STORIES OF IMAGINATION

FANTASTIC

JANUARY
50¢

Fafhrd and the Mouser
Dare the Cavern World of
THE LORDS
OF QUARMALL

A Novel by
Fritz Leiber

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in January AMAZING Fact and Science Fiction stories

what began as a harmless experiment, turned into a dangerous and destructive threat

The experimental ray that seared its way into the abysses of Earth could not be halted. The only hope for human survival lay in the hands of a few strangely-powered men. For super-science at its best, read SPEED-UP!—by Christopher Anvil.

Also in the same banner issue:

The most ghastly terror on Jupiter, "The Skeleton Men," by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Scientist Ben Bova explores the possibilities of interstellar travel, from ramjet engines to space warps.

It's the January Amazing. Now on sale—Only 50¢

FANTASTIC, Stories of Imagination, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 1964, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, at 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60605. (Ziff-Davis also publishes—Popular Photography, Popular Electronics, Electronics World, HiFi/Stereo Review, Popular Boating, Car and Driver, Flying, Modern Bride and Amazing Stories.) Subscription rates: One year United States and possessions $4.00; Canada and Pan American Union Countries $4.50; all other foreign Countries $5.00. Second class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois and at additional mailing offices.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These great minds were Rosicrucians . . .

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THEY POSSESS?

Benjamin Franklin

Isaac Newton

Francis Bacon

Why were these men great?

How does anyone — man or woman — achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life!

Benjamin Franklin, statesman and inventor... Isaac Newton, discoverer of the Law of Gravitation . . . Francis Bacon, philosopher and scientist . . . like many other learned and great men and women . . . were Rosicrucians. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) have been in existence for centuries. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

The ROSICRUCIANS

San Jose (AMORC) California, U.S.A.

THIS BOOK FREE!

Write for your FREE copy of "The Mastery of Life" — TODAY. No obligation. A non-profit organization. Address: Scribe X.S.L.

SEND THIS COUPON

Scribe X.S.L.
The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
San Jose, California, U.S.A.

Please send me the *free* book, *The Mastery of Life*, which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STORIES OF IMAGINATION

FANTASTIC

JANUARY 1964

Volume 13 Number 1

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1953)

William Ziff, President

W. Bradford Briggs, Executive Vice President

Hershel B. Sarbin, Vice President and General Manager

M. T. Birmingham, Jr., Vice President and Treasurer

Robert P. Breeding, Circulation Director

Stanley R. Greenfield, Vice President

Phillip T. Heffernan, Vice President

Editorial Director
NORMAN M. LOBSENZ

Editor
CELE GOLDSMIH

Ziff-Davis Publishing Company
Editorial and Executive Offices
One Park Avenue
New York, New York 10016
212 ORegon 9-7200
Advertising Manager,
Harold Cymes

Midwestern and Circulation Office
434 South Wabash Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60605
312 WAbash 2-4911

Western Office
9025 Wilshire Boulevard
Beverly Hills, California 90211
213 CRestview 4-0265

NOVELET

LAST ORDER
By Gordon Walters 74

SHORT STORIES

MINNESOTA GOTHIC
By Dobbin Thorpe 52

THE WORD OF UNBINDING
By Ursula K. LeGuin 66

A THESIS ON SOCIAL FORMS & SOCIAL CONTROLS IN THE U.S.A.
By Thomas M. Disch 114

SERIAL

THE LORDS OF QUARMALL
By Fritz Leiber and Harry Fischer 6
(First of Two Parts)

FEATURES

EDITORIAL 5
COMING NEXT MONTH 73
FANTASY BOOKS 127

Cover: Emsh
Illustrating *The Lords of Quarmall*

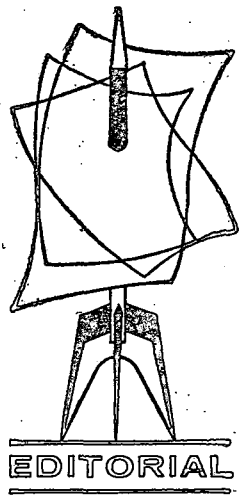
SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: All subscription correspondence should be addressed to FANTASTIC, Circulation Department, 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Please allow at least six weeks for change of address. Include your old address, as well as new—enclosing if possible an address label from a recent issue.

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

Copyright © 1963 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



OLD friends of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser may be surprised to see a byline on their story in this issue that reads—"By Fritz Leiber and Harry Fischer." "Who," you are saying, "is Harry Fischer? Some Johnny-come-lately trying to horn in on Leiber's master-characters?"

Well, hardly. According to Fritz himself, Harry Fischer is the inventor of Fafhrd and the Mouser. And this is indeed a tale in itself, and one with which we shall acquaint you here and now, in the words of Leiber himself:

"Harry and I met in 1930 at the University of Chicago, became fast friends, and have been friends ever since. We had in common enthusiasms for fencing, chess, bridge, drama, and fantasy literature. In our correspondence we often extemporized fragments of fantasy. One day I got a letter from Harry inventing two characters. He wrote: 'All do fear the one known as the Gray Mouser. He walks with swagger 'mongst the bravos, though he's but the stature of a child. His costume is all of grey. His weapons [are called] Cat's Claw and Scalpel . . . Fafhrd was full seven feet of height. His wrist . . . was thick as a hero's ankle. . . . His mouth smiled as he fingered the ponderous hilt of a huge longsword.' "

From this beginning, Fischer and Leiber utilized Fafhrd and the Mouser in their dreams and fantasy fragments. In 1937 Fischer wrote about 10,000 words of a novel to be called *The Lords of Quarmall,* a subterranean kingdom Leiber had invented as part of the land of Nehwon. But the fragment languished for 25 years. During this time Leiber wrote other sagas of Lankhmar, and Fischer put aside the fantasy world to become a successful businessman (the corrugated-box business). He now lives in Clarksburg, W. Va., with his wife and two sons.

A year ago, however, Leiber visited Fischer and suggested that he (Leiber) finish Quarmall. So Fritz took the original 10,000 words, plotted and wrote over twice as many more, and—lo! the result begins on page 6.

"Over the years," Leiber has said, "the Mouser and Fafhrd have become such good friends to me, teasing or bullying me out of my

(*Continued on page 126*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

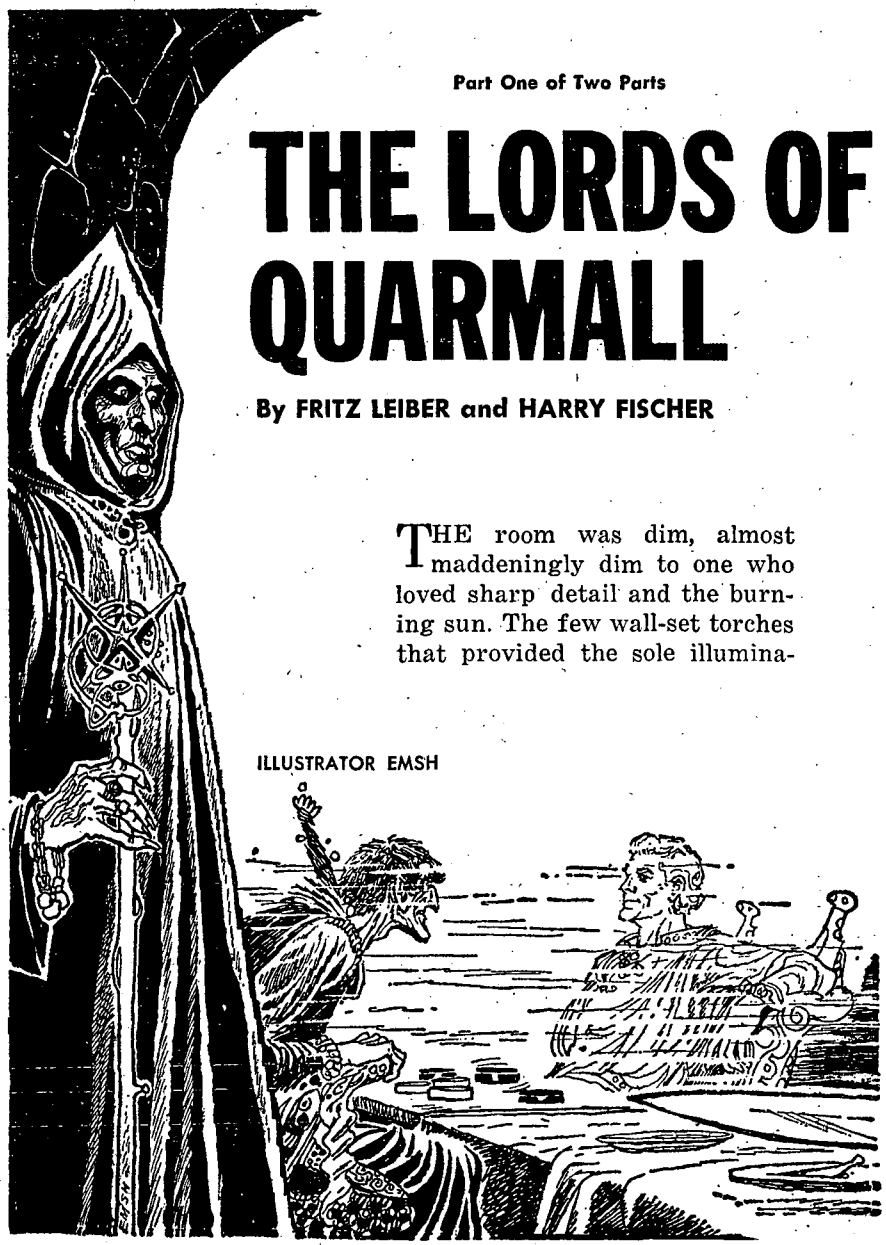
Part One of Two Parts

THE LORDS OF QUARMALL

By FRITZ LEIBER and HARRY FISCHER

THE room was dim, almost maddeningly dim to one who loved sharp detail and the burning sun. The few wall-set torches that provided the sole illumina-

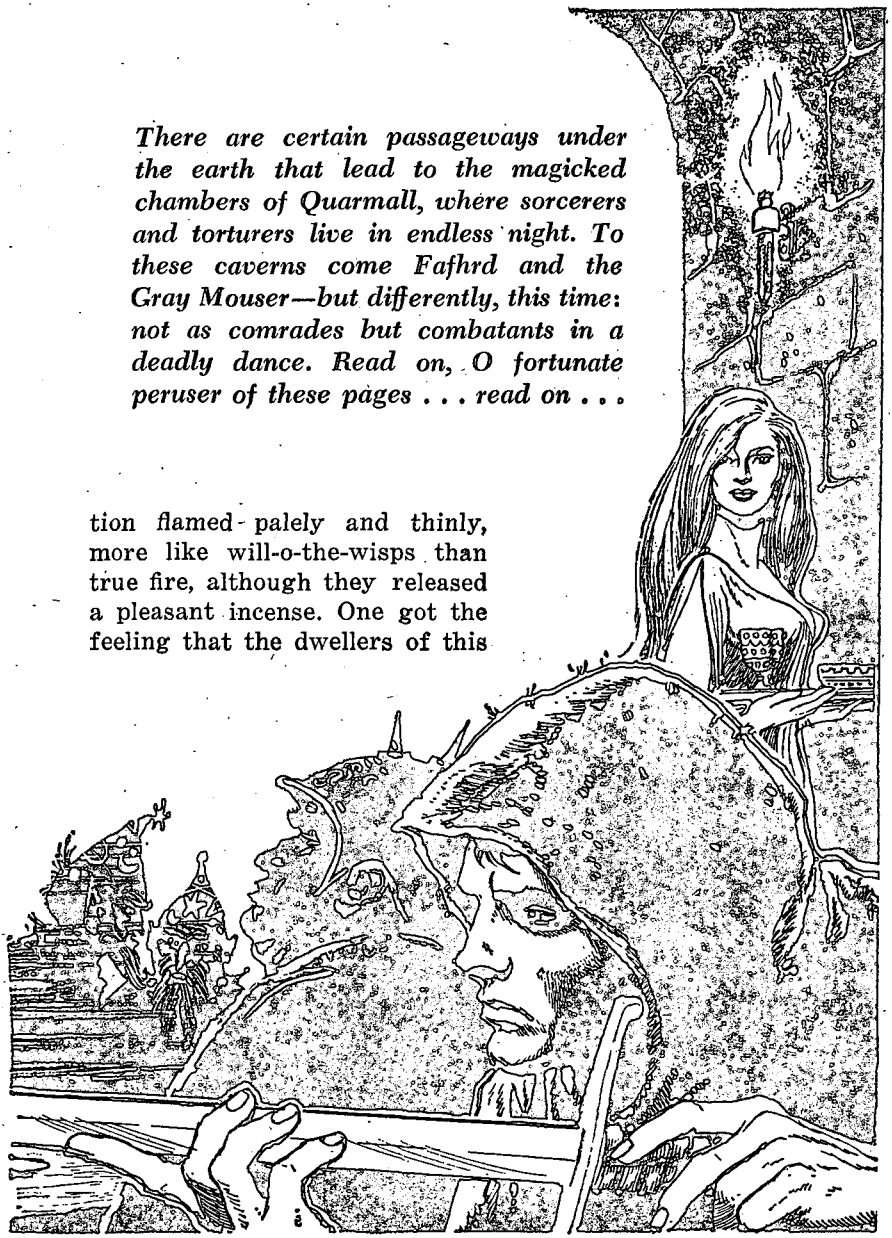
ILLUSTRATOR EMSH



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There are certain passageways under the earth that lead to the magicked chambers of Quarmall, where sorcerers and torturers live in endless night. To these caverns come Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser—but differently, this time: not as comrades but combatants in a deadly dance. Read on, O fortunate peruser of these pages . . . read on . . .

tion flamed palely and thinly, more like will-o-the-wisps than true fire, although they released a pleasant incense. One got the feeling that the dwellers of this



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

region resented light and only tolerated a thin mist of it for the benefit of strangers.

Despite its vast size, the room was carved all in somber solid rock—smooth floor, polished curving walls, and domed ceiling—either a natural cave finished by man or else chipped out and burnished entirely by human effort, although the thought of that latter amount of work was near intolerable. From numerous deep niches between the torches, metal statuettes and masks and jeweled objects gleamed darkly.

Through the room, bending the feeble bluish flames, came a perpetual cool draft bringing acid odors of damp ground and moist rock which the sweet spicy scent of the torches never quite masked.

The only sounds were the occasional rutch of rock on wood from the other end of the long table, where a game was being played with black and white stone counters—that and from beyond the room the ponderous sighing of the great fans that sucked down the fresh air on its last stage of passage from the distant world above and drove it through this region . . . and the perpetual soft thudding of the naked feet of the slaves on the heavy leather tread-belts that drove those great wooden fans . . . and the very faint mechanic gasping of those slaves.

After one had been in this region for a few days, or only a few hours, the sighing of the fans and the soft thudding of the feet and the faint gaspings of the tortured lungs seemed to drone out only the name of this region, over and over.

"Quarmall . . ." they seemed to chant. "Quarmall . . . Quarmall is all. . ."

The Gray Mouser, upon whose senses and through whose mind these sensations and fancies had been flooding and flitting, was a small man strongly muscled. Clad in gray silks irregularly woven, with tiny thread-tufts here and there, he looked restless as a lynx and as dangerous.

FROM a great tray of strangely hued and shaped mushrooms set before him like sweetmeats, the Mouser now disdainfully selected and nibbled cautiously at the most normal looking, a gray one. Its perfumy savor masking bitterness offended him and he spat it surreptitiously into his palm and dropped that hand under the table and flicked the wet chewed fragments to the floor. Then while he sucked his cheeks sourly, the fingers of both his hands began to play as slowly and nervously with the hilts of his sword Scalpel and his dagger Cat's Claw as his mind played with his boredoms and murky wonderings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Along each side of the long narrow table, in great high-backed chairs widely spaced, sat six scrawny old men, bald or shaven of dome and chin and chicken-fluted jowl, and each clad only in a neat white loincloth. Eleven of these stared intently at nothing and perpetually tensed their meager muscles until even their ears seemed to stiffen, as though concentrating mightily in realms unseen. The twelfth had his chair half turned and was playing across a far corner of the table the board-game that made the occasional tiny rutching noises. He was playing it with the Mouser's employer Gwaay, ruler of the Lower Levels of Quarmall and younger son to Quarmal, Lord of Quarmall

Although the Mouser had been three days in Quarmall's depths, he had come no closer to Gwaay than he was now, so that he knew him only as a pallid handsome soft-spoken youth, no realer to the Mouser, because of the eternal dimness and the invariable distance between them, than a ghost

The game was one the Mouser had never seen before and quite tricky in several respects.

The board looked green, though it was impossible to be certain of colors in the unending twilight of the torches, and it had no perceptible squares or tracks on it, except for a phosphorescent line midway between the opponents dividing the board into two equal fields.

Each contestant started the game with twelve flat circular counters set along his edge of the board. Gwaay's counters were obsidian-black, his ancient opponent's marble-white, so the Mouser was able to distinguish them despite the dimness.

The object of the game seemed to be to move the pieces randomly forward over uneven distances and get at least seven of them into your opponent's field first.

Here the trickiness was that one moved the pieces not with the fingers but only by looking at them intently. Apparently if one gazed only at a single piece, one could move it quite swiftly. If one gazed at several, one could move them all together in a line or cluster, but more sluggishly.

The Mouser was not yet wholly convinced that he was witnessing a display of thought-power. He still suspected threads, soundless air-puffings, surreptitious joggings of the board from below, powerful beetles under the counters, and hidden magnets!—for Gwaay's pieces at least could by their color be some sort of loadstone.

AT the present moment Gwaay's black counters and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the ancient's white ones were massed at the central line, shifting only a little now and then as the push-of-war went first a nail's-breadth one way, then the other. Suddenly Gwaay's rearmost counter circled swiftly back and darted toward an open space at the board's edge. Two of the ancient's counters moved to block it. Six of Gwaay's other counters formed a wedge and thrust across the mid-line through the weak point thus created. As the ancient's two detached counters returned to oppose them, Gwaay's end-running counter sped across. The game was over—Gwaay gave no sign of this, but the ancient began fumblingly to return the pieces to their starting positions with his fingers.

"Ho, Gwaay, that was easily won!" the Mouser called out cockily. "Why not take on two of them together? The oldster must be a sorcerer of the Second Rank to play so weakly—or even a doddering apprentice of the Third."

The ancient shot the Mouser a venomous gaze. "We are, all twelve of us, sorcerers of the First Rank and have been from our youth," he proclaimed portentously. "As you should swiftly learn were one of us to point but a little finger against you."

"You have heard what he says," Gwaay called softly to the Mouser without looking at him.

The Mouser, daunted no whit, at least outwardly, called back, "I still think you could beat two of them together, or seven—or the whole decrepit dozen! If they are of First Rank, you must be of Zero or Negative Magnitude."

The ancient's lips worked speechlessly and bubbled with froth at that affront, but Gwaay only called pleasantly, "Were but three of my faithful mages to cease their sorcerous concentrations, my brother Hasjarl's sendings would burst through from the Upper Levels and I would be stricken with all the diseases in the evil compendium, and a few others that exist in Hasjarl's putrescent imagination alone—or perchance I should be erased entire from this life."

"If nine out of twelve must be forever a-guarding you, they can't get much sleep," the Mouser observed, calling back.

"Times are not always so troublous," Gwaay replied tranquilly. "Sometimes custom or my father enjoins a truce. Sometimes the dark inward sea quiets. But today I know by certain signs that a major assault is being made on the liver and lights and blood and bones and rest of me. Dear Hasjarl has a double coven of sorcerers hardly inferior to my own—Second Rank, but High Second—and he whips them on. And I am as distasteful to Hasjarl, oh Gray Mouser, as the sim-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ple fruits of our manure beds are to your lips. Tonight, furthermore, my father Quarmal casts his Horoscope in the tower of the Keep, high above Hasjarl's Upper Levels, so it befits I keep all rat-holes closely watched."

IF it's magical helpings you lack," the Mouser retorted boldly, "I have a spell or two would frizzle your elder brother's witches and warlocks!" And truth to tell the Mouser had parchment-crackling in his pouch one spell—though one spell only—which he dearly wanted to test. It had been given him by his own wizardly mentor and master, Sheelba of the Eyeless Face.

Gwaay replied, softlier than ever, so that the Mouser felt that if there had been a yard more between them he would not have heard, "It is your work to ward from my physical body Hasjarl's sword-sendings, in particular those of this great champion he is reputed to have hired. My sorcerers of the First Rank will shield off Hasjarl's sorcerous billets-doux. Each to his proper occupation." He lightly clapped his hands together. A slim slave girl appeared noiselessly in the dark archway beyond him. Without looking once over-shoulder at her, Gwaay softly commanded, "Strong wine for our warrior." She vanished.

The ancient had at last laboriously shuffled the black and white counters into their starting positions and Gwaay regarded his thoughtfully. But before making a move, he called to the Mouser, "If time still hangs heavy on your hands, devote some of it to selecting the reward you will take when your work is done. And in your search overlook not the maiden who brings you the wine. Her name is Ivivis."

At that the Mouser shut up. He had already chosen more than a dozen expensive be-charming objects from Gwaay's drawers and niches and locked them in a disused closet he had discovered two levels down. If this should be discovered, he would explain that he was merely making an innocent pre-selection pending final choice, but Gwaay might not view it that way and Gwaay was sharp, judging from the way he'd noted the rejected mushroom and other things.

It had not occurred to the Mouser to pre-empt a girl or two by locking her in the closet also, though it was admittedly an attractive idea.

The ancient cleared his throat and said chucklingly across the board, "Lord Gwaay, let this ambitious sworder try his sorcerous tricks. Let him try them on me!"

The Mouser's spirits rose, but Gwaay only raised palm and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shook his head slightly and pointed a finger at the board and the ancient began obediently to think a piece forward.

The Mouser's spirits fell. He was beginning to feel very much alone in this dim underworld where all spoke and moved in whispers. True, when Gwaay's emissary had approached him in Lankhmar, the Mouser had been happy to take on this solo job. His huge sword-mate Fafhrd had become overweening of late, claiming too much of the credit for their shared exploits, or at least so the Mouser had felt. It was time he proved he could do very well without the big chap. It would teach the loud-voiced Northerner a lesson if his small gray comrade (and brain!) should disappear one night without a word . . . and then return perchance a year later with a brimful treasure chest and a mocking smile.

THE Mouser had even been happy all the long caravan trip from Lankhmar south to Quarmall, along the Hlal River and past the Lakes of Pleea and through the Mountains of Hunger. It had been a positive pleasure to loll on a swaying camel beyond reach of Fafhrd's hugeness and disputatious talk and boisterous ways, while the nights grew ever bluer and warmer and strange jewel-fiery stars came peering over the southern horizon.

But now he had been three nights in Quarmall since his secret coming to the Lower Levels —three nights and days, or rather one hundred and forty-four interminable demi-hours of buried twilight—and he was already beginning in his secretest mind to wish that Fafhrd were here, instead of half a continent away in Lankhmar—or even farther than that if he'd carried out his misty plans to revisit his northern homeland. Someone to drink with, at any rate!—and even a roaring quarrel would be positively refreshing after seventy-two hours of nothing but silent servitors, tranced sorcerers, stewed mushrooms, and Gwaay's unbreakable soft-tongued equanimity.

Besides, it appeared that all Gwaay wanted was a mighty sworder to nullify the threat of this champion Hasjarl was supposed to have hired as secretly as Gwaay had smuggled in the Mouser. If Fafhrd were here, he could be Gwaay's sworder, while the Mouser would have better opportunity to peddle Gwaay his magical talents. The one spell he had in his pouch—he had got it from Sheelba in return for the tale of the Perversions of Clutho —would forever establish his reputation as an archimage of deadly might he was sure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Mouser came out of his musings to realize that the slave girl Ivivis was kneeling before him—for how long she had been there he could not say—and proffering an ebony tray on which stood a squat stone jug and a copper cup.

Her slim body was most supple—she held the difficult pose effortlessly. Her fine straight hair was pale as her skin—both a sort of ghost color. It occured to the Mouser that she would look very well in his closet, perhaps cherishing against her bosom the necklace of large black pearls he had discovered piled behind a pewter statuette in one of Gwaay's niches.

However, she was kneeling as far away from him as she could and still stretch him the tray and her eyes were most modestly downcast, nor would she even flicker up their lids to his gracious murmurings—which were all the approach he thought suitable at this moment.

He seized the jug and cup. Ivivis drooped her head still lower in acknowledgement, then flitted silently away.

The Mouser poured a finger of blood-red blood-thick wine and sipped. Its flavor was darkly sweet, but with a bitter undertaste. He wondered if it were fermented from scarlet toadstools.

The black and white counters skittered rutchingly in obedience to Gwaay's and the ancient's peerings. The pale torch flames bent to the unceasing cool breeze. While the fan-slaves and their splayed bare feet on the leathern belts and the great unseen fans themselves on their ponderous axles muttered unendingly, "Quarmall . . . Quarmall is downwards tall . . . Quarmall . . . Quarmall is all. . . ."

* * *

IN an equally vast room many levels higher yet still underground—a windowless room where torches flared redder and brighter, but their brightness nullified by an acrid haze of incense smoke, so that here too the final effect was exasperating dimness—Fafhrd sat at table-foot.

Fafhrd was a very big man, clad in wolf-fur and rough-beaten bronze, and ordinarily he was a monstrously calm man, but now he was restlessly drumming fist on thumb-root, on the verge of admitting to himself that he wished the Gray Mouser were here, instead of back in Lankhmar or perchance off on some ramble in the desert-patched Eastern Lands.

The Mouser, Fafhrd thought, might have more patience to unriddle the mystifications and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crooked behavior-ways of these burrowing Quarmallians. The Mouser might find it easier to endure Hasjarl's loathsome taste for torture, and at least the little gray fool would be someone human to drink with!

Fafhrd had been very glad to be parted from the Mouser and from his vanities and tricksiness and chatter when Hasjarl's agent had contacted him in Lankhmar, proffering large pay in return for Fafhrd's instant, secret, and solitary coming. Fafhrd had even dropped a hint to the small fellow that he might take ship with some of his Northerner countrymen who had sailed down across the Inner Sea.

What he had not explained to the Mouser was that, as soon as Fafhrd was aboard her, the longship had sailed not north but south, coasting through the vasty Outer Sea along Lankhmar's western seaboard.

It had been an idyllic journey, that—pirating a little now and then, battling great storms and also the giant cuttlefish, rays, and serpents which swarmed ever thicker in the Outer Sea as one sailed south. At the recollection Fafhrd's fist slowed its drumming and his lips almost formed a long smile.

But now this Quarmall! This endless stinking sorcery! This torture-besotted Hasjarl! Fafhrd's fist drummed fiercely again.

Rules!—he mustn't explore downward, for that led to the Lower Levels and the enemy. Nor must he explore upward—that way were father Quarmal's apartments, sacrosanct. None must know of Fafhrd's presence. He must satisfy himself with such drink and inferior wenches as were available in Hasjarl's limited Upper Levels. (They called these dim labyrinths and crypts *upper!*)

Delays!—they mustn't muster their forces and march down and smash brother-enemy Gwaay, that was unthinkable rashness. They mustn't even shut off the huge treadmill-driven fans whose perpetual creaking troubled Fafhrd's ears and which sent the life-giving air on the first stages of its journey to Gwaay's underworld, and through other rock-driven wells sucked out the stale—no, those fans must never be stopped, for father Quarmall would frown on any battle-tactic which suffocated valuable slaves; and anything father Quarmall frowned on, his sons shrank shuddering from.

Instead, Hasjarl's war-council must plot years-long campaigns weaponed chiefly with sorcery and envisioning the conquest of Gwaay's Lower Levels a quarter-tunnel—or a quarter mushroom field!—at a time.

Mystifications! — Mushrooms must be served at all meals but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

never eaten or so much as tasted. Roast rat, on the other hand, was a delicacy to be crowed over. Tonight father Quarmal would cast his own Horoscope and for some reason that superstitious star-sighting and scribbling would be of incalculable cryptic consequence. All maids must scream loudly twice when familiarities were suggested to them, no matter what their subsqeuent behavior. Fafhrd must never get closer to Hasjarl than a long dagger's-cast—a rule which gave Fafhrd no chance to discover how Hasjarl managed never to miss a detail of what went on around him while keeping his eyes fully closed almost all the time.

Perhaps Hasjarl had a sort of short-range second sight, or perhaps the slave nearest him ceaselessly whispered an account of all that transpired, or perhaps—well, Fafhrd had no way of knowing.

But somehow Hasjarl could see things with his eyes shut.

THIS paltry trick of Hasjarl's evidently saved his eyes from the irritation of the incense smoke, which kept those of Hasjarl's sorcerers and of Fafhrd himself red and watering. However, since Hasjarl was otherwise a most energetic and restless prince—his bandy-legged misshapen body and mismated arms forever a-twitch, his ugly face always a-grimacing—the detail of eyes tranquilly shut was peculiarly jarring and shiversome.

All in all, Fafhrd was heartily sick of the Upper Levels of Quarmall though scarcely a week in them. He had even toyed with the notion of double-crossing Hasjarl and hiring out to his brother or turning informer for his father—although they might, as employers, be no improvement whatever.

But mostly he simply wanted to meet in combat this champion of Gwaay's he kept hearing so much of—meet him and slay him and then shoulder his reward (preferably a shapely maiden with a bag of gold in her either hand) and turn his back forever on the accursed dim-tunneled whisper-haunted hill of Quarmall!

In an excess of exasperation he clapped his hand to the hilt of his longsword Graywand.

Hasjarl saw that, although Hasjarl's eyes were closed, for he quickly pointed his gnarly face down the long table at Fafhrd, between the ranks of the twenty-four heavily-robed thickly-bearded sorcerers crowded shoulder to shoulder. Then, his eyelids still shut, Hasjarl commenced to twitch his mouth as a preamble to speech and with a twitter-tremble as overture

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

called, "Ha, hot for battle, eh, Fafhrd boy? Keep him in the sheath! Yet tell me, what manner of man do you think this warrior—the one you protect me against—Gwaay's grim manslayer? He is said to be mightier than an elephant in strength, and more guileful than the very Zobolds," and with a final spasm Hasjarl managed, still without opening his eyes, to look expectantly at Fafhrd.

Fafhrd had heard all this sort of worrying time and time again during the past week, so he merely answered with a snort:

"Zutt! They all say that about anybody. I know. But unless you get me some action and keep these old flea-bitten beards out of my sight—"

Catching himself up short, Fafhrd tossed off his wine and beat with his pewter mug on table for more. For although Hasjarl might have the demeanor of an idiot and the disposition of a ocelot, he served excellent ferment of grape ripened on the hot brown southern slopes of Quarmall hill . . . and there was no profit in goading him.

NOR did Hasjarl appear to take offense—or if he did, he took it out on his bearded sorcerers, for he instantly began to instruct one to enunciate his runes more clearly, question another as to whether his herbs were sufficiently pounded, remind a third that it was time to tinkle a certain silver bell thrice, and in general treat the whole two dozen as if they were a roomful of schoolboys and he their eagle-eyed pedagogue—though Fafhrd had been given to understand that they were all mages of the First Rank.

The double coven of sorcerers in turn began to bustle more nervously each with his particular spell—touch off more stinks, jiggle black drops out of more dirty vials, wave more wands, pin-stab more figurines, finger-trace eldritch symbols more swiftly in the air, mound up each in front of him from his bag more noisome fetishes, and so on.

From his hours of sitting at table-foot, Fafhrd had learned that most of the spells were designed to inflict a noisome disease upon Gwaay: the Black Plague, the Red Plague, the Boneless Death, the Hairless Decline, the Slow Rot, the Fast Rot, the Green Rot, the Bloody Cough, the Belly Melts, the Ague, the Runs, and even the footling Nose Drip. Gwaay's own sorcerers, he gathered, kept warding off these malefic spells with countercharms, but the idea was to keep on sending them in hopes that the opposition would some day drop their guard, if only for a few moments.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fafhrd rather wished Gwaay's gang were able to reflect back the disease-spells on their dark-robed senders. He had become weary even of the abstruse astrologic signs stitched in gold and silver on those robes, and of the ribbons and precious wires knotted cabalistically in their heavy beards.

Hasjarl, his magicians disciplined into a state of furious busyness, opened wide his eyes for a change and with only a preliminary lipwrithe called to Fafhrd, "So you want action, eh, Fafhrd boy?"

Fafhrd, mightily irked at the last epithet, planted an elbow on the table and wagged that hand at Hasjarl and called back, "I do. My muscles cry to bulge. You've strong-looking arms, Hasjarl lord. What say you we play the wrist game?"

Hasjarl tittered evilly and cried, "I go but now to play another sort of wrist game with a maid suspected of commerce with one of Gwaay's pages. She never screamed even once . . . then. Wouldst accompany me and watch the action, Fafhrd?" And he suddenly shut his eyes again with the effect of putting on two tiny masks of skin—yet shut them so firmly there could be no question of his peering through the lashes.

Fafhrd shrank back in his chair, flushing a little. Hasjarl had divined Fafhrd's distaste for torture on the Northerner's first night in Quarmall's Upper Levels and since then had never missed an opportunity to play on what Hasjarl must view as Fafhrd's weakness.

TO cover his embarrassment, Fafhrd drew from under his tunic a tiny book of stitched parchment pages. The Northerner would have sworn that Hasjarl's eyelids had not flickered once since closing, yet now the villain cried, "The stgil on the cover of that packet tells me it is something of Ningauble of the Seven Eyes. What is it, Fafhrd?"

"Private matters," the latter retorted firmly. Truth to tell, he was somewhat alarmed. The contents of the packet were such as he dared not permit Hasjarl see. And just as the villain somehow knew, there was indeed on the top parchment the bold black figure of a seven-fingered hand, each finger bearing an eye for a nail—one of the many signs of Fafhrd's wizardly patron.

Hasjarl coughed hackingly. "No servant of Hasjarl has private matters," he pronounced "However, we will speak of that at another time. Duty calls me." He bounded up from his chair and fiercely eyeing his sorcerers cried at them barkingly, "If I find one of you dozing over his spells when I return, it were bet-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ter for him—aye and for his mother too—had he been born with slave's chains on his ankles!"

He paused turning to go and pointing his face at Fafhrd again, called rapidly yet cajolingly, "The girl is named Friska. She's but seventeen. I doubt not she will play the wrist game most adroitly and with many a charming exclamation. Sure you won't come?" And trailing an evil titter behind him, Hasjarl strode rapidly from the room, red torches in the archway outlining his monstrous bandy-legged form in blood.

Fafhrd ground his teeth. There was nothing he could do at the moment. Hasjarl's torture chamber was also his guard barrack. Yet the Northerner chalked up in his mind an intention, or perhaps an obligation.

To keep his mind from nasty unmanning imaginings, he began carefully to reread the tiny parchment book which Ningauble had given him as a sort of reward for past services, or an assurance for future ones, on the night of the Northerner's departure from Lankhmar.

Fafhrd did not worry about Hasjarl's sorcerers overlooking what he read. After their master's last threat, they were all as furiously and elbow-jostlingly busy with their spells as so many bearded black ants.

QUARMALL was first brought to my attention [*Fafhrd read in Ningauble's little hand-written, or tentacle-writ book*] by the report that certain passageways beneath it ran deep under the Sea and extended to certain caverns wherein might dwell some remnant of the Elder Ones. Naturally I dispatched agents to probe the truth of the report: two well-trained and valuable spies were sent (also two others to watch them) to find the facts and accumulate gossip. Neither pair returned, nor did they send messages or tokens in explanation, or indeed word of any sort. I was interested; but being unable, at that time, to spare valuable material on so uncertain and dangerous a quest, I bided my time until information should be placed at my disposal (as it usually is).

After twenty years my discretion was rewarded. [*So went the crabbed script as Fafhrd continued to read.*] An old man, horribly scarred and peculiarly pallid, was fetched me. His name was Tamorg, and his tale interesting in spite of the teller's incoherence. He claimed to have been captured from a passing caravan when yet a small lad and carried into captivity within Quarmall. There he served as a slave on the Lower Levels, far below the ground. Here there was no natural light, and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only air was sucked down into the mazy caverns by means of large fans, treadmill-driven; hence his pallor and otherwise unusual appearance.

Tamorg was quite bitter about these fans, for he had been chained at one of those endless belts for a longer time than he cared to think about. (He really did not know exactly how long, since there was by his own statement, no measure of time in the Lower Levels.) Finally he was released from his onerous walking, as nearly as I could glean from his garbled tale, by the invention or breeding of a specialized type of slave who better served the purpose.

From this I postulate that the Masters of Quarmall are sufficiently interested in the economics of their holdings to improve them: a rarity among Overlords. Moreover if these specialized slaves were bred, the life-span of these Overlords must perforce be longer than ordinary; or else the cooperation between father and son is more perfect than any filial relationship I have yet noted.

TAMORG further related that he was put to more work digging, along with eight other slaves likewise taken from the treadmills. They were forced to enlarge and extend certain passages and chambers; so for another space of time he mined and buttressed. This time must have been long, for by close cross-questioning I found that Tamorg digged and walled, single-handed, a passage a thousand and twenty paces long. These slaves were not chained, unless maniacal, nor was it necessary to bind them so; for these Lower Levels seem to be a maze within a maze, and an unlucky slave once strayed from familiar paths stood small chance of retracing his steps. However, rumor has it, Tamorg said, that the Lords of Quarmall keep certain slaves who have memorized each a portion of the ever-extending labyrinth. By this means they are able to traverse with safety and communicate one level to the other.

Tamorg finally escaped by the simple expedient of accidentally breaking through the wall whereat he dug. He enlarged the opening with his mattock and stooped to peer. At that moment a fellow workman pushed against him and Tamorg was thrust head-foremost into the opening he had made. Fortunately it led into a chasm at the bottom of which ran a swift but deep underground stream, into which Tamorg fell. As swimming is an art not easily forgotten, he managed to keep afloat until he reached the outer world. For sev-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eral days he was blinded by the sun's rays and felt comfortable only by dim torchlight.

I questioned him in detail about the many interesting phenomena which must have been before him constantly but he was very unsatisfactory, being ignorant of all observational methods. However I placed him as gatekeeper in the palace of D . . . ., whose coming and going I desired to check upon. So much for that source of information.

My interest in Quarmall was aroused [*Ninguable's book went on*] and my appetite whetted by this scanty meal of facts, so I applied myself toward getting more information. Through my connexion with Sheelba I made contact with Eeack, the Overlord of Rats; by holding out the lure of secret passages to the granaries of Lankhmar, he was persuaded to visit me. His visit proved both barren and embarassing. Barren because it turned out that rats are eaten as a delicacy in Quarmall and hunted for culinary purposes by well trained weasels. Naturally under such circumstances any rat within the walls of Quarmall stood little chance of doing liasion work except from the uncertain vantage of a pot. Eeack's personal cohort of countless rats, evil-smelling and famished, consumed all edibles within reach of their sharp teeth; and out of pity for the plight in which I was left Eeack favored me, by cajoling Scraa to wake and speak with me.

SCRAA [*Ningauble's notes continued*] is one of those eon-old roaches who existed contemporaneously with those monstrous reptiles which once ruled the world, and whose racial memories go back into the mistiness of time before the Elder Ones retreated from the surface. Scraa presented me the following short history of Quarmall neatly inscribed on a peculiar parchment composed of cleverly welded wing-cases flattened and smoothed most subtly. I append his document and apologize for his somewhat dry and prosy style.

"The city-state of Quarmall houses a civilization almost unheard of in the sphere of anthropoid organization. Perhaps the closest analogy which might be made is to that of the slave-making ants. The domain of Quarmall is at the present day limited to the small mountain, or large hill, on which it stands; but like a radish the main portion of it lies buried beneath the surface. This was not always so.

"Once the Lords of Quarmall ruled over broad meadows and vasty seas; their ships swam between all known ports and their caravans marched the routes from sea to sea. Slowly from the fertile valleys and barren cliffs, from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the desert spots and the open sea the grip of Quarmall loosened; not willingly but ever forced did the Lords of Quarmall retreat. Inexorably they were driven, year by year, generation by generation from all their possessions and rights; until finally they were confined to that last and staunchest stronghold, the impregnable castle of Quarmall. The cause of this driving is lost in the dimness of fable; but it was probably due to those most gruesome practices which even to this day persuade the surrounding countryside that Quarmall is unclean and cursed.

"As the Lords of Quarmall were pushed back, driven in spite of their sorceries and valor, they burrowed under that last, vast stronghold ever deeper and ever broader. Each succeeding Lord dug more deeply into the bowels of the small mount on which sate the Keep of Quarmall. Eventually the memory of past glories faded and was forgot, and the Lords of Quarmall concentrated on their mazy tunneling to the exclusion of the outer world. They would have forgotten the outer world entirely but for their constant and ever increasing need of slaves and of sustenance for those slaves.

"The Lords of Quarmall are magicians of great repute and Adepts in the practice of the Art. It is said that by their skill they can charm men into bondage both of body and of soul."

So much did Scraa write. All in all it is a very unsatisfactory bit of gossip: hardly a word about those intriguing passageways which first aroused my interest; nothing about the conformation of the Land or its inhabitants; not even a map! But then poor ancient Scraa lives almost entirely in the past—the present will not become important to him for another eon or so.

However I believe I know two fellows who might be persuaded to undertake a mission there . . . [*Here Ninguable's notes ended, much to Fafhrd's irritation and suspicious puzzlement —and carking shamed discomfort too, for now he must think again of the unknown girl Hasjarl was torturing.*]

* * *

OUTSIDE the mount of Quarmall the sun was past meridian and shadows had begun to grow. The great white oxen threw their weight against the yoke. It was not the first time nor would it be the last, they knew. Each month as they approached this mucky stretch of road the Master whipped and slashed them frantically; attempting to goad them into a speed which they, by nature, were unable to attain. Straining until the harness creaked, they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

obliged as best they could: for they knew that when this spot was pulled the Master would reward them with a bit of salt, a rough caress, and a brief respite from work. It was unfortunate that this particular piece of road stayed mucky long after the rains had ceased; almost from one season to the next. Unfortunate that it took a longer time to pass.

Their master had reason to lash them so. This spot was accounted accursed among his people. From this curved eminence the towers of Quarmall could be spied on; and more important these towers looked down upon the road, even as one looking up could see them. It was not healthy to look on the towers of Quarmall, or to be looked upon by them. There was sufficient reason for this feeling. The Master of the oxen spat surreptitiously, made an obvious gesture with his fingers, and glanced fearfully over his shoulder at the sky-thrusting lacy-topped towers he feared as the last mud-hole was traversed. Even in this fleeting glance he caught the glimpse of a flash, a brilliant scintillation, from the tallest keep. Shuddering he leaped into the welcome covert of the trees and thanked the gods he worshipped for his escape.

Tonight he would have much to speak of in the tavern. Men would buy him bowls of wine to swill; and bitter beer of herbs. He could lord it for an evening. Ah! but for his quickness he might even now be plodding soulless to the mighty gates of Quarmall; there to serve until his body was no more and even after. For tales were told of such charmings, and of other things, amongst the elders of the village: tales that bore no moral but which all men did heed. Was it not only last Serpent Eve that young Twelm went from the ken of men? Had he not jeered at these very tales and, drunken, braved the terraces of Quarmall? Sure, and this was so! And it was also ture that his less brave companion had seen him swagger with bravado to the last, the highest terrace almost to the moat; then when Twelm alarmed at some unknown cause, turned to run, his body twisted-arched was pulled willy-nilly back into the darkness. Not even a scream was heard to mark the passing of Twelm from this earth and the ken of his fellow-men. Juln, that less brave or less foolhardy companion of Twelm, had spent his time thenceforth in a continual drunken stupor. Nor would he stir from under roofs at night.

All the way to the village the Master of the oxen pondered. He tried to formulate in his dim peasant intellect a method by which he might present himself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as a hero. But even as he painfully constructed a simple, self-aggrandizing tale, he bethought himself of the fate of that one who had dared to brag of robbing Quarmalls' vinyards; the one whose name was spoken only in a hushed whisper, secretly. So the driver decided to confine himself to facts, simple as they were, and trust to the atmosphere of horror that he knew any manifestation of activity in Quarmall would arouse.

WHILE the driver was still whipping his oxen, and the Mouser watching two shadow-men play a thought-game, and Fafhrd swilling wine to drown the thought of an unknown girl in pain—at that same time Quarmal, Lord of Quarmall, was casting his own Horoscope for the coming year. In the highest tower of the Keep he labored; putting in order the huge astrolabe and the other massive instruments necessary for his accurate observations.

Through curtains of broidery the afternoon sun beat hotly into the small chamber; beams glanced from the polished surfaces and scintillated into rainbow hues as they reflected askew. It was warm, even for an old man lightly gowned, and Quarmal stepped to the windows opposite the sun and drew the broidery aside, letting the cool moor-breeze blow through his observatory.

He glanced idly out the deep-cut wide embrasures. In the distance down past the terraced slopes he could see the little, curved brown thread of road which led eventually to the village.

Like ants the small figures on it appeared: ants struggling through some sticky trap; and like ants, even as Quarmal watched, they persisted and finally disappeared. Quarmal sighed as he turned away from the windows. Sighed in a slight disappointment because he regretted not having looked a moment sooner. Slaves were always needed. Besides it would have been an opportunity for trying out a recently invented instrument or two.

Yet it was never Quarmal's way to regret the past, so with a shrug he turned away.

For an old man Quarmal was not particularly hideous until his eyes were noticed. They were peculiar in their shape and the ball was a rich ruby-red. The dead-white iris had that nauseous sheen of pearly iridescence found only in the sea dwellers among living creatures; this character he inherited from his mother, a mer-woman. The pupils, like specks of black crystal, sparkled with malevolent intelligence incredible. His baldness

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was accentuated by the long tufts of coarse black hair which grew symmetrically over each ear. Pale pitted skin hung loosely on his jowls, but was tightly drawn over the high cheek-bones. Thin as a sharpened blade, his long jutting nose gave him the appearance of an old hawk or kestrel.

IF Quarmal's eyes were the most arresting feature in his countenance, his mouth was the most beautiful. The lips were full and ruddy, remarkable in so aged a man, and they had that peculiar mobility found in some elocutionists and orators and actors. Had it been possible for Quarmal to have known vanity, he might have been vain about the beauty of his mouth; as it was this perfectly moulded mouth served only to accentuate the horror of his eyes.

He looked up veiledly now through the iron rondures of the astrolabe at the twin of his own face pushing forth from a windowless square of the opposite wall: it was his own waxen life-mask, taken within the year and most realistically tinted and blackly hair-tufted by his finest artist, save that the white-irised eyes were of necessity closed—though the mask still gave a feeling of peering. The mask was the last in several rows of such, each a little more age-darkened than the succeeding one. Though some were ugly and many were elderly-handsome, there was a strong family resemblance between the shut-eyed faces, for there had been few if any intrusions into the male lineage of Quarmall.

There were perhaps fewer masks than might have been expected, for most Lords of Quarmall lived very long and had sons late. Yet there were also a considerable many, since Quarmall was such a most ancient rulership. The oldest masks were of a brown almost black and not wax at all but the cured and mummified face skins of those primeval autocrats. The arts of flaying and tanning had early been brought to an exquisite degree of perfection in Quarmall and were still practiced with jealously prideful skill.

Quarmal dropped his gaze from the mask to his lightly-robed body. He was a lean man, and his hips and shoulders still gave evidence that once he had hawked, hunted, and fenced with the best. His feet were high arched and his step was still light. Long and spatulate were his knob-knuckled fingers, while fleshy muscular palms gave witness to their dexterity and nimbleness; a necessary advantage to one of his calling. For Quarmal was a sorcerer, as were all the Lords of Quarmall from the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eon-misty past. From childhood up through manhood each male was trained into his calling; like some vines are coaxed to twist and thread a difficult terrace.

As Quarmal returned from the window to attend his duties he pondered on his training. It was unfortunate for the House of Quarmall that he possessed two instead of the usual single heir. Each of his sons was a creditable necromancer and well skilled in other sciences pertaining to the Art; both were exceeding ambitious and filled with hatred. Hatred not only for one another but for Quarmal their father.

QUARMAL pictured in his mind Hasjarl in his Upper Levels below the Keep and Gwaay below Hasjarl in his Lower Levels . . . Hasjarl cultivating his passions as if in some fiery circle of Hell, making energy and movement and logic carried to the ultimate the greatest goods, constantly threatening with whips and tortures and carrying through those threats, and now hiring a great brawling beast of a man to be his sworder . . . Gwaay nourishing restraint as if in Hell's frigidest circle, trying to reduce all life to art and intuitive thought, seeking by meditation to compel lifeless rock to do his bidding and constrain Death by the power of his will, and now hiring a small gray man like Death's younger brother to be his knifer . . . Quarmal thought of Hasjarl and Gwaay and for a moment a strange smile of fatherly pride bent his lips and then he shook his head and his smile became stranger still and he shuddered very faintly.

It was well, thought Quarmal, that he was an old man, far past his prime, even as magicians counted years; for it would be unpleasant to cease living in the prime of life, or even in the twilight of life's day. And he knew that sooner or later, in spite of all protecting charms and precautions, Death would creep silently on him or spring suddenly from some unguarded moment. This very night his Horoscope might signal Death's instant escapeless approach; and though men lived by lies, treating truth's very self as lie to be exploited, the stars remained the stars.

Each day Quarmal's sons, he knew, grew more clever and more subtle in their usage of the Art which he had taught them. Nor could Quarmal protect himself by slaying them. Brother might murder brother, or the son his sire, but it was forbidden from ancient times for the father to slay his son. There were no very good reasons for this custom, nor were any needed. Custom in the House of Quarmall stood unchallenged, and it was not lightly defied.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quarmal bethought him of the babe sprouting in the womb of Kewissa, the childlike favorite concubine of his age. So far as his precautions and watchfulness might have enforced, that babe was surely his own—and Quarmal was the most watchful and cynically realistic of men. If that babe lived and proved a boy—as omens foretold would be—and if Quarmal were given but twelve more years to train him, and if Hasjarl and Gwaay should be taken by the fates or each other . . .

Quarmal clipped off in his mind this line of speculation. To expect to live a dozen more years with Hasjarl and Gwaay growing daily more clever-subtle in their sorceries—or to hope for the dual extinguishment of two such cautious sprigs of his own flesh—were vanity and unrealistic indeed!

HE looked around him. The preliminaries for the casting were completed; the instruments prepared and aligned; now only the final observations and their interpretation were required. Lifting a small leaden hammer Quarmal lightly struck a brazen gong. Hardly had the resonance faded when the tall, richly appareled figure of a man appeared in the arched doorway.

Flindach was Master of the Magicians. His duties were many but not easily apparent. His power carefully concealed was second only to that of Quarmal. A wearied cruelty sate upon his dark visage giving him an air of boredom which ill matched the consuming interest he took in the affairs of others. Flindach was not a comely man: a purple wine mark covered his left cheek, three large warts made an isosceles triangle on his right, while his nose and chin jutted like those of an old witch. Startlingly, with an effect of mocking irreverence, his eyes were ruby-whited and pearly-irised like those of his lord; he was a younger offspring of the same mer-woman who had birthed Quarmal—after Quarmal's father had done with her and following one of Quarmall's bizarre customs, given her to *his* Master of the Magicians.

Now those eyes of Flindach, large and hypnotically staring, shifted uneasily as Quarmal spoke: "Gwaay and Hasjarl, my sons, work today on their respective Levels. It would be well if they were called into the council room this night. For it is the night on which my doom is to be foretold. And I sense premonitorily that this casting will bear no good. Bid them dine together and permit them to amuse one another by plotting at my death—or by attempting each other's."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He shut his lips precisely as he finished, and looked more evil than a man expecting Death should look. Flindach, used to terrors in the line of business, could scarce repress a shudder at the glance bestowed on him; but remembering his position he made the sign of obeisance, and without a word or backward look departed.

THE GRAY MOUSER did not once remove his gaze from Flindach as the latter strode across the domed dim sorcery-chamber of the Lower Levels until he reached Gwaay's side. The Mouser was mightily intrigued by the warts and wine mark on the cheeks of the richly-robed witchy-faced man, and by his eerie red-whited eyes, and he instantly gave this charming visage a place of honor in the large catalogue of freak-faces he stored in his memory vaults.

Although he strained his ears, he could not hear what Flindach said to Gwaay or what Gwaay answered.

Gwaay finished the telekinetic game he was playing by sending all his black counters across the midline in a great rutching surge that knocked half his opponent's white counters tumbling into his loinclothed lap. Then he rose smoothly from his stool.

"I sup tonight with my beloved brother in my all-revered father's apartments," he pronounced mellowly to all. "While I am there and in the escort of great Flindach here, no sorcerous spells may harm me. So you may rest for a space from your protective concentrations, oh my gracious mages of the First Rank." He turned to go.

The Mouser, inwardly leaping at the chance to glimpse the sky again, if only by chilly night, rose springily too from his chair and called out, "Ho, prince Gwaay! Though safe from spells, will you not want the warding of my blades at this dinner party? There's many a great prince never made king 'cause he was served cold iron 'twixt the ribs between the soup and the fish. I also juggle most prettily and do conjuring tricks."

Gwaay half turned back. "Nor may steel harm me while my sire's hand is stretched above," he called so softly that the Mouser felt the words were being lobbed like feather balls barely as far as his ear. "Stay here, Gray Mouser."

His tone was unmistakably rebuffing, nevertheless the Mouser dreading a dull evening persisted, "There is also the matter of that serious spell of mine of which I told you, Prince—a spell most effective against mages of the *Second* Rank and lower, such as a certain noxious brother employs. Now were a good time—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Let there be no sorcery tonight!" Gwaay cut him off sternly, though speaking hardly louder than before. "'Twere an insult to my sire and to his great servant Flindach here, a Master of Magicians, even to think of such! Bide quietly, swordsman, keep peace, and speak no more." His voice took on a pious note. "There will be time enough for sorcery and swords, if slaying there must be."

Flindach nodded solemnly at that and they silently departed. The Mouser sat down. Rather to his surprise, he noted that the twelve aged sorcerer were already curled up like pillbugs on their sides on their great chairs and snoring away. He could not even while away time by challenging one of them to the thought-game, hoping to learn by playing, or to a bout at conventional chess. This promised to be a most glum evening indeed.

Then a thought brightened the Mouser's swarthy visage. He lifted his hands, cupping the palms, and clapped them lightly together as he had seen Gwaay do.

The slim slave girl Ivivis instantly appeared in the far archway. When she saw that Gwaay was gone and his sorcerers slumbering, her eyes became bright as a kitten's. She scampered to the Mouser, her slender legs flashing, seated herself with a last bound on his lap, and clapped her lissome arms around him.

FAFHRD silently faded back into a dark side-passage as Hasjarl came hurrying along the torchlit corridor beside a richly robed official with hideously warted and mottled face and red eyeballs, on whose other side strode a pallid comely youth with strangely ancient eyes. Fafhrd had never before met Flindach or, of course, Gwaay.

Hasjarl was clearly in a pet, for he was grimacing insanely and twisting his hands together furiously as though pitting one in murderous battle against the other. His eyes however were tight shut. As he stamped swiftly past, Fafhrd thought he glimpsed a bit of tatooing on the nearest upper eyelid.

Fafhrd heard the red-eyeballed one say, "No need to run to your sire's banquet-board, Lord Hasjarl. We're in good time." Hasjarl answered only a snarl, but the pale youth said sweetly, "My brother is ever a baroque pearl of dutifulness."

Fafhrd moved forward, watched the three out of sight, then turned the other way and followed the scent of hot iron straight to Hasjarl's torture chamber.

It was a wide low-vaulted room and the brightest Fafhrd had yet

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

encountered in these murky misnamed Upper Levels.

To the right was a low table around which crouched five squat brawny men more bandy-legged than Hasjarl and masked each to the upper lip. They were noisily gnawing bones snatched from a huge platter of them, and swilling ale from leather jacks. Four of the masks were black, one red.

Beyond them was a fire of coals in a circular brick tower half as high as a man. The iron grill above it glowed redly. The coals brightened almost to white, then grew more deeply red again, as a twisted half-bald hag in tatters slowly worked a bellows.

Along the walls to either side, derk dire instruments hung thickly.

To the left a fair-haired pleasingly plump girl in white undertunic lay bound to a rack. Her right hand in an iron half-glove stretched out tautly toward a machine with a crank. Although her face was tear-streaked, she did not seem to be in present pain.

Fafhrd strode toward her, hurriedly slipping out of his pouch and onto the middle finger of his right hand the massy ring Hasjarl's emissary had given him in Lankhmar as token from his master. It was of silver, holding a large black seal on which was Hasjarl's sign: a clenched fist.

The girl's eyes widened with new fears as she saw Fafhrd coming.

Hardly looking at her as he paused by the rack, Fafhrd turned toward the table of masked messy feasters, who were staring at him gape-mouthed by now, and stretching out toward them the back of his right hand, called harshly yet carelessly, "By authority of this sigil, release to me the girl Friska!" From mouth-corner he muttered to the girl, "Courage!"

THE black-masked creature who came hurrying toward him like a terrier appeared either not to recognize at once Hasjarl's sign or else not to reason out its import, for he said only, wagging a greasy finger, "Begone, barbarian. This dainty morsel is not for you. Think not here to quench your rough lusts. Our Master—"

Fafhrd cried out, "If you will not accept the authority of the Clenched Fist one way, then you must take it the other," and doubling up the hand with the ring on it, he smashed it against the torturer's suet-shining jaw so that he stretched himself out on the dark flags, skidded a foot, and lay quietly.

Fafhrd turned at once toward the half-risen feasters and slapping Graywand's hilt but not drawing it, he planted his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knuckles on his hips and addressing himself to the red mask, he barked out rather like Hasjarl, "Our Master of the Fist had an afterthought and ordered me fetch the girl Friska so that he might continue her entertainment at dinner for the amusement of those he goes dine with. Would you have a new servant like myself report to Hasjarl your derelictions and delays? Loose her quickly and I'll say nothing." He stabbed a finger at the hag by the bellows. "You!—fetch her outer dress."

The masked ones sprang to obey quickly enough at that, their tucked-up masks falling over their mouths and chins. There were mumblings of apology, which he ignored. Even the one he had slugged got groggily to his feet and tried to help.

The girl had been released from her wrist-twisting device, Fafhrd supervising, and she was sitting up on the side of the rack when the hag came with a dress and two slippers, the toe of one stuffed with oddments of ornament and such. The girl reached for them, but Fafhrd grabbed them instead and seizing her by the left arm dragged her roughly to her feet.

"No time for that now," he commanded. "We will let Hasjarl decide how he wants you trigged out for the sport," and without more ado he strode from the torture chamber, dragging her beside him, though again muttering from mouth-side, "Courage."

WHEN they were around the first bend in the corridor and had reached a dark branching, he stopped and looked at her frowningly. Her eyes grew wide with fright, she shrank from him, but then firming her features she said fearful-boldly, "If you rape me by the way, I'll tell Hasjarl."

"I don't mean to rape but rescue you, Friska," Fafhrd assured her rapidly. "That talk of Hasjarl sending to fetch you was but my trick. Where's a secret place I can hide you for a few days?—until we flee these musty crypts forever! I'll bring you food and drink."

At that Friska looked far more frightened. "You mean Hasjarl didn't order this? And that you dream of escaping from Quarmall? Oh stranger, Hasjarl would only have twisted my wrist a while longer, perhaps not maimed me much, only heaped a few more indignities, certainly spared my life. But if he so much as suspected that I had sought to escape from Quarmall . . . Take me back to the torture chamber!"

"That I will not," Fafhrd said irkedly, his gaze darting up and down the empty corridor. "Take heart, girl. Quarmall's not the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wide world. Quarmall's not the stars and the sea. Where's a secret room?"

"Oh it's hopeless," she faltered. "We could never escape. The stars are a myth. Take me back."

"And make myself out a fool? No," Fafhrd retorted harshly. "We're rescuing you from Hasjarl and from Quarmall too. Make up your mind to it, Friska, for I won't be budged. If you try to scream I'll stop your mouth. *Where's a secret room?*" In his exasperation he almost twisted her wrist, but remembered in time and only brought his face close to hers and rasped, "*Think!*" She had a scent like heather underlying the odor of sweat and tears.

Her eyes went distant then and she said in a small voice, almost dreamlike, "Between the Upper and the Lower Levels there is a great hall with many small rooms adjoining. When I was a babe it was chief banquet hall but now debated ground between Hasjarl and Gwaay. Both claim it, neither will maintain it, not even sweep its dust. It is called the Ghost Hall." Her voice went smaller still. "Gwaay's page once begged me meet him there, but I did not dare."

"Ha, that's the very place," Fafhrd said with a grin. "Lead us to it."

"But I don't remember the way," Friska protested. "Gwaay's page told me, but I tried to forget . . ."

Fafhrd had spotted a spiral stair in the dark branchway. Now he strode instantly toward it, drawing Friska along beside him.

"We know we have to start by going down," he said with rough cheer. "Your memory will improve with motion, Friska."

* * *

THE GRAY MOUSER stretched luxuriously on the silver-tipped bearskin he'd thrown on the floor of his closet. Then he lifted on an elbow and finding the black pearls he'd pilfered, tried them against Ivivis' bosom in the pale cool light of a single torch above. Just as he'd imagined, the pearls looked very well there. He started to fasten them around her neck.

"No, Mouser," she objected lazily. "It awakens an unpleasant memory."

He did not persist, but lying back again, said unguardedly, "Ah, but I'm a lucky man, Ivivis. I have you and I have an employer who, though somewhat boresome with his sorceries and his endless mild speaking, seems a harmless enough chap and certainly more endurable than his brother Hasjarl, if but half of what I hear of that one be true."

The voice of Ivivis briskened.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You think Gwaay harmless?—and kinder than Hasjarl? La, that's a quaint conceit. Why, but a week agone he summoned my late dearest friend, Divis, then his favorite concubine, and telling her it was a necklace of the same stones, hung round her neck an emerald adder, the sting of which is infallibly deadly."

The Mouser turned his head and stared at Ivivis. "Why did Gwaay do that?" he asked.

She stared back at him blankly. "Why, for nothing at all, to be sure," she said wonderingly. "As everyone knows, that is Gwaay's way."

* * *

Fafhrd started to brush aside the cobwebs joining the two dust-filmed sides of the half-open high nail-studded door, then checked himself and bending very low ducked under them.

"Do you stoop too," he told Friska. "It were best we leave no signs of our entry. Later I'll attend to our footprints in the dust, if that be needful."

They advanced a few paces, then stood hand in hand, waiting for their eyes to grow accustomed to the darkness. Fafhrd still clutched in his other hand Friska's dress and slippers. It had been a hurrying nervous trip, with many peerings around corners and dartings back into dark alcoves while someone passed, and a longer trip vertically downward than Fafhrd had anticipated. If they had now only reached the top of the Lower Levels, this Quarmall must be bottomless! Yet Friska's spirits had improved considerably.

"This is the Ghost Hall?" Fafhrd asked.

"Aye," Friska whispered, beginning to sound fearful again. "Some say that Gwaay and Hasjarl send their dead to battle here. Some say that demons owing allegiance to neither—"

"No more of that, girl," Fafhrd ordered gruffly. "If I must battle devils or liches, leave me my ears and my courage."

They were silent a space then while the flame of the last torch twenty paces beyond the half-shut door slowly revealed to them a vast chamber low-domed with huge rough blocks pale-mortared for a ceiling. It was set out with a few tatter-shrouded furnishings and showed many small closed doorways. To either side were wide rostra set a few feet above floor level, and toward the center there was, surprisingly, what looked like a dried-up fountain pool.

Friska whispered, "Some say the Ghost Hall was once the harem of the father lords of Quarmall during some centuries when

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they dwelt underground between Levels, ere this Quarmal's father coaxed by his sea-wife returned to the Keep."

Fafhrd distrusted the unpillared ceiling of the room and thought the whole place looked far more primitive than Hasjarl's polished and leather-hung chambers. That gave him a thought.

"Tell me, Friska," he said, "how is it that Hasjarl can see with his eyes closed? Is it that —"

"Why, do you not know that?" she interrupted in surprise. "Do you not know even the secret of his horrible peeping? He simply—"

A dim velvet shape that chittered almost inaudibly shrill swooped past their faces and with a little shriek Friska hid her face in Fafhrd's chest and clung to him tightly.

In combing his fingers through her heather-scented hair to show her no flying mouse had found lodgement there and in smoothing his palms over her bare shoulders and back to demonstrate that no bat had landed there either, Fafhrd began to forget all about Hasjarl and the puzzle of his second sight—and his worries about the ceiling falling in on them too.

GWAAY languidly clapped his white perfectly groomed hands and with a slight nod motioned for the waiting slaves to remove the platters from the low table. He leaned lazily into the deep-cushioned chair and through half-closed lids looked momentarily at his companion before he spoke. His brother across the table was not in a good humor. But then it was rare for Hasjarl to be other than in a pet, a temper, or more often merely sullen and vicious. This may have been due to the fact that Hasjarl was a very ugly man, and his nature had grown to conform to his body; or perhaps it was the other way around. Gwaay was indifferent to both theories; he merely knew that in one glance all his memory had told him of Hasjarl was verified; and he again realized the bitter magnitude of his hatred for his brother. However Gwaay spoke gently in a low, pleasant voice:

"Well, how now, Brother, shall we play at chess, that demon game they say exists in every world? 'Twill give you a chance to lord it over me again. You always win at chess you know, except when you resign. Shall I have the board set before us?" and then cajolingly, "I'll give you a pawn!" and he raised one hand slightly as if to clap again in order that his suggestion might be carried out.

With the lash he carried slung to his wrist Hasjarl slashed the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

face of the slave nearest him, and silently pointed at the massive and ornate chess-board across the room. This was quite characteristic of Hasjarl. He was a man of action and given to few words, at least away from his home territory.

Besides, Hasjarl was in a nasty humor. Flindach had torn him from his most interesting and exciting amusement: torture! And for what? thought Hasjarl: to play at chess with his prigish brother; to sit and look at his pretty brother's face; to eat food that would surely disagree with him; to wait the answer to the casting, which he already knew—had known for years; and finally to be forced to smile into the horrible blood-whited eyes of his father, unique in Quarmall save for those of Flindach, and to toast the House of Quarmall for the ensuing year. All this was most distasteful to Hasjarl and he showed it plainly.

The slave, a bloody welt swift-swelling across his face, carefully slid the chess-board between the two. Gwaay smiled as another slave arranged the chessmen precisely on their squares; he had thought of a scheme to annoy his brother. He had chosen the black as usual and he planned a gambit which he knew his avaricious opponent couldn't refuse; one Hasjarl would accept to his own undoing.

HASJARL sat grimly back in his chair, arms folded. "I should have made you take white," he complained. "I know the paltry tricks you can do with black pebbles—I've seen you as a girl-pale child darting them through the air to startle the slaves' brats. How am I to know you will not cheat by fingerless shifting your pieces while I deep ponder?"

Gwaay answered gently, "My paltry powers, as you most justly appraise them, Brother, extend only to bits of basalt, trifles of obsidian and other volcanic rocks conformable to my nether level. While these chess pieces are jet, Brother, which in your great scholarship you surely know is only a kind of coal, vegetable stuff pressed black, not even in the same realm as the very few materials subject to my small magickings. Moreover, for you to miss slightest trick with those quaint slave-surgeried eyes of yours, Brother, were matter for mighty wonder."

Hasjarl growled. Not until all was ready did he stir; then, like an adder's strike, he plucked a black rook's pawn from the board and with a sputtering giggle, snarled:

"Remember, Brother? It was a pawn you promised! Move!"

Gwaay motioned the waiting slave to advance his King's Pawn. In like manner Hasjarl

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

replied. A moment's pause and Gwaay offered his gambit: Pawn to King-Bishop's fourth! Eagerly Hasjarl snatched the apparent advantage and the game began in earnest. Gwaay, his face easy-smiling in repose, seeming to be less interested in the game than in the shadow-play of the flickering lamps on the figured leather upholsterings of calfskin, lambskin, snakeskin, and even slaveskin and nobler human hide; seeming to move off-hand, without plan, yet confidently. Hasjarl his lips compressed in concentration, eyes intent on the board; each move a planned action both mental and physical. His concentration made him for the moment oblivious of his brother; oblivious of all but the problem before him; for Hasjarl loved to win beyond all computation.

It had always been this way; even as children the contrast was apparent. Hasjarl was the elder; older by only a few months which his appearance and demeanor lengthened to years. His long, misshapen torso was ill-borne on short bandy legs. His left arm was perceptibly longer than the right; and his fingers, peculiarly webbed to the first knuckle, were gnarled and stubby with brittle striated nails. It was as if Hasjarl were a poorly reconstructed puzzle put together in such fashion that all the pieces were mismated and awry.

This was particularly true of his features. He possessed his sire's nose, though thickened and coarse-pored; but this was contradicted by the thin-lipped tightly compressed mouth continually pursed until it had assumed a perpetual sphincter-like appearance. Hair, lank and lusterless, grew low on his forehead; and low flattened cheekbones added yet another contradiction.

AS a lad, led by some perverse whim, Hasjarl had bribed, coaxed, or more probably browbeaten one of the slaves versed in surgery to perform a slight operation on his upper eyelids. It was a small enough thing in itself, yet its implications and results had affected the lives of many men unpleasantly, and never ceased to delight Hasjarl.

That merely the piercing of two small holes, centered over the pupil when the eyes were closed, could produce such qualms in other people was incredible; but it was so. Featherweight grommets of sleekest gold, jade or—as now—ivory—kept the holes from growing shut.

When Hasjarl peered through these tiny apertures it gave the effect of an ambush and made the object of his gaze feel spied upon; but this was the least annoy-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing of his many irritating habits.

Hasjarl did nothing easily but he did all things well. Even in swordplay his constant practice and overly long left arm made him the equal of the athletic Gwaay. His administration of the Upper Levels over which he ruled, was above all things economical and smooth; for woe betide the slave who failed in the slightest detail of his duties. Hasjarl saw and punished.

Hasjarl was well nigh the equal of his teacher in the practice of the Art; and he had gathered about him a band of magicians almost the calibre of Flindach himself. But he was not happy in his prowess so hardly won, for between the absolute power which he desired and the realization of that desire stood two obstacles: the Lord of Quarmall whom he feared above all things; and his brother Gwaay whom he hated with a hatred nourished on envy and fed by his own thwarted desires.

Gwaay, antithetically, was supple of limb, well-formed and good to look upon. His eyes, wide-set and pale, were deceptively gentle and kindly; for they masked a will as strong and capable of action as coiled spring-steel. His continual residence in the Lower Levels over which he ruled gave to his pallid smooth skin a peculiar waxy luster.

Gwaay possessed that enviable ability to do all things well, with little exertion and less practice. In a way he was much worse than his brother; for while Hasjarl slew with tortures and slow pain and an obvious personal satisfaction, he at least attached some importance to life because he was so meticulous in its taking; whereas Gwaay smiling gently would slay, without reason, as if jesting. Even the group of sorcerers which he had gathered about him for protection and amusement was not safe from his fatal and swift humors.

Some thought that Gwaay was a stranger to fear; but this was not so. He feared the Lord of Quarmall and he feared his brother; or rather he feared that he would be slain by his brother before he could slay him. Yet so well were his fear and hatred concealed that he could sit relaxed, not two yards from Hasjarl, and smile amusedly enjoying every moment of the evening. Gwaay flattered himself on his perfect control over all emotion.

THE chess game had developed beyond the opening stage, the moves coming slower, and now Hasjarl rapped down a Rook on the seventh rank.

Gwaay observed gently, "Your turreted warrior rushes deep into my territory, Brother. Rumor has it you've hired a brawny

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

champion out of the north. With what purpose, I wonder, in our peace-wrapped cavern world? Could he be a sort of living Rook?" He poised hand unmoving over one of his Knights.

Hasjarl giggled, "And if his purpose be to slash pretty throats, what's that to you? I know naught of this Rook-warrior, but 'tis said—slaves' chat, no doubt—that you yourself have had fetch a skilled sworder from Lankhmar. Should I call him a Knight?"

"Aye, two can play at a game," Gwaay remarked with prosy philosophy and lifting his Knight, softly but firmly planted it at his King's Sixth.

"I'll not be drawn," Hasjarl snarled. "You shall not win by making my mind wander." And arching his head over the board, he cloaked himself again with his all-consuming calculations.

In the background slaves moved silently tending the lamps and replenishing the founts with oil. Many lamps were needed to light the council-room, for it was low-ceiled and massively beamed, and the walls arras-hung reflected little of the yellow rays and the mosaic floor was worn to a dull richness by countless footsteps in the past. From the living rock this room had been carved; long forgotten hands had set the huge cypress beams and inlaid the floor so cunningly. Those gay, time-faded tapestries had been hung by the slaves of some ancient Lord of Quarmall, who had pilfered them from a passing caravan; and so with all the rich adornments. The chessmen and the chairs, the chased lamp-sconces and the oil which fed the wicks, and the slaves which tended them; all was loot. Loot from generations back when the Lords of Quarmall plundered far and wide and took their toll from every passing caravan.

HIGH ABOVE that warm, luxuriously furnished chamber where Gwaay and Hasjarl played at chess, the Lord of Quarmall finished the final calculations which would complete his Horoscope. Heavy leather hangings shut out the stars that had but now twinkled down their benisons and dooms. The only light in that instrument-filled room was the tiny flare of a single taper. By such scant illumination did custom bid the final casting be read, and Quarmal strained even his keen vision to see the Signs and Houses rightly.

As he rechecked the final results his supple lips writhed in a sneer, a grimace of displeasure. *Tonight or tomorrow,* he thought with an inward chill. *At most, late on the morrow. Truly, he had little time.*

Then, as if pleased by some subtle jests, he smiled and nod-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ded, making his skinny shadow perform monstrous gyrations on the curtains and brasured wall.

Finally Quarmal laid aside his crayon, and taking the single candle lighted by its flame seven larger tapers. With the aid of this better light he read once more the Horoscope. This time he made no sign of pleasure or any other emotion. Slowly he rolled the intricately diagrammed and inscribed parchment into a slender tube, which he thrust in his belt; then rubbing together his lean hands he smiled again. At a nearby table were the ingredients which he needed for his scheme's success: powders, oils tiny knives, and other materials and instruments.

The time was short. Swiftly he worked, his spatulate fingers performing miracles of dexterity. Once he went on an errand to the wall. The Lord of Quarmall made no mistakes, nor could he afford them.

It was not long before the task was completed to his satisfaction. After extinguishing the last-lit candles Quarmal, Lord of Quarmall, relaxed into his chair and by the dim light of a single taper summoned Flindach, in order that his Horoscope might be announced to those below.

As was his wont, Flindach appeared almost at once. He presented himself confronting his master with arms folded across his chest, and head bowed submissively. Flindach never presumed. His figure was illuminated only to the waist, above that shadow concealed whatever expression of interest or boredom his warted and wine-marked face might show. In like manner the pitted yet sleeker countenance of Quarmal was obscured, only his pale eyes gleamed phosphorescent from the shadows like two minute moons in a dark bloody sky.

AS IF he were measuring Flindach, or as if he saw him for the first time, Quarmal slowly raised his glance from foot to forehead of the figure before him, and looking direct into the shaded eyes of Flindach so like his own, he spoke: "O Master of Magicians, it is within your power to grant me a boon this night."

He raised a hand as Flindach would have spoken and swiftly continued: "I have watched you grow from boy to youth and from youth to man; I have nurtured your knowledge of the Art until it is only second to my own. The same mother carried us, though I her firstborn and you the child of her last fertile year—that kinship helped. Your influence within Quarmall is almost equal to mine. So I feel that some reward is due your diligence and faithfulness."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Again Flindach would have spoken, but was dissuaded by a gesture. Quarmal spoke more slowly now, and accompanied his words with staccato taps on the parchment roll. "We both well know, from hearsay and direct knowledge, that my sons plot my death. And it is also true that in some manner they must be thwarted, for neither of the twain is fit to become the Lord of Quarmall; nor does it seem probable that either will ever reach such wisdom. Under their warring, Quarmall would die of inanition and neglect, as has died the Ghost Hall. Furthermore, each of them, to buttress his sorceries, has secretly hired a sworded champion from afar—you've seen Gwaay's—and this is the beginning of the bringing of free mercenaries into Quarmall and the sure doom of our power." He stretched a hand toward the dark close-crowded rows of mummied and waxen masks and he asked rhetorically, "Did the Lords of Quarmall guard and preserve our hidden realm that its councils might be entered crowded, and at last captured by foreign captains?

"Now a far secreter matter," he continued, his voice sinking. "The concubine Kewissa carries my seed: male-growing, by all omens and oracles—though this is known only to Kewissa and myself, and now to you, Flindach. Should this unborn sprout reach but boyhood brotherless, I might die content, leaving to you his tutelage in all confidence and trust."

Quarmal paused and sat impassive as an effigy. "Yet to forestall Hasjarl and Gwaay becomes more difficult each day, for they increase in power and in scope. Their own innate wickedness gives them access to regions and demons heretofore but imagined by their predecessors. Even I, well versed in necromancy, am oftimes appalled." He paused and quizzically looked at Flindach.

FOR the first time since he had entered Flindach spoke. His voice was that of one trained in the recitation of incantations, deep and resonant: "Master, what you speak is true. Yet how will you encompass their plots? You know, as well as I, the custom that forbids what is perhaps the only means of thwarting them."

Flindach paused as if he would say more, but Quarmal quickly intervened: "I have concocted a scheme, which may or may not succeed. The success of it depends almost entirely upon your cooperation." He lowered his voice almost to a whisper, beckoning for Flindach to step closer. "The very stones may carry tales, O Flindach, and I would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that this plan were kept entirely secret." Quarmal beckoned again, and Flindach stepped still nearer until he was within arm's reach of his master. Half stooping he placed himself in such a position that his ear was close to Quarmal's mouth. This was closer than ever he remembered approaching Quarmal, and strange qualms filled his mind, recrudescences of childish old wives' tales. This ancient ageless man with eyes pearl-irised as his own seemed to Flindach not like half-brother at all, but like some strange merciless half-father. His burgeoning terror was intensified when he felt the sinewy fingers of Quarmal close on his wrist and gently urge him closer, almost to his knees, beside the chair.

Quarmal's lips moved swiftly, and Flindach controlled his urge to rise and flee as the plan was unfolded to him. With a sibilant phrase, the final phrase, Quarmal finished, and Flindach realized the full enormity of that plan. Even as he comprehended it, the single taper guttered and was extinguished. There was darkness absolute.

THE CHESS GAME progressed swiftly; the only sounds, except the ceaseless shuffle of naked feet and the hiss of lamp-wicks, were the dull click of the chessmen and the staccato cough of Hasjarl. The low table off which the twain had eaten was placed opposite to the broad arched door which was the only apparent entrance to the council chamber.

There was another entrance. It led to the Keep of Quarmall; and it was towards this arras-concealed door that Gwaay glanced most often. He was positive that the news of the casting would be as usual, but a certain curiosity whelmed him this evening; he felt a faint foreshadowing of some untoward event, even as wind blows gusty before a storm.

An omen had been vouchsafed Gwaay by the gods today; an omen that neither his necromancers nor his own skill could interpret to his complete satisfaction. So he felt that it would be wise to await the development of events prepared and expectant.

Even as he watched the tapestry behind which he knew was the door whence would step Flindach to announce the consequences of the casting, that hanging bellied and trembled as if some breeze blew on it, or some hand pushed against it lightly.

Hasjarl abruptly threw himself back in his chair and cried in his high-pitched voice, "Check with my Rook to your King, and mate in three!" He drooped one eyelid evilly and peered triumphantly at Gwaay.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gwaay, without removing his eyes from the still swaying tapestry, said in precise mellow words, "The Knight interposes, Brother, discovering check. I mate in two. You are wrong again, my comrade."

But even as Hasjarl swept the men with a crash to the floor, the arras was more violently disturbed. It was parted by two slaves and the harsh gong-note, announcing the entrance of some high official, sounded.

Silently from betwixt the hangings stepped the tall lean form of Flindach. His shadowed face, despite the disfiguring wine-mark and the treble mole, had a great and solemn dignity. And in its somber expressionlessness—an expressionlessness curiously mocked by a knowing glitter deep in the black pupils of the pearl-irised crimson-balled eyes—it seemed to forebode some evil tiding.

All motion ceased in that long low hall as Flindach, standing in the archway framed in rich tapestries, raised one arm in a gesticulation demanding silence. The attendant slaves well-trained stood at their posts, heads bowed submissively; Gwaay remained as he was, looking directly at Flindach; and Hasjarl, who had half-turned at the gong note, likewise awaited the announcement. In a moment, they knew, Quarmal their father would step from behind Flindach and evilly smiling announce his Horoscope. Always this had been the procedure; and always, since each could remember, Gwaay and Hasjarl had at this moment wished for Quarmal's death.

FLINDACH, arm lifted in dramatic gesture, began to speak:

"The casting of the Horoscope has been completed and the finding has been made. Even as the Heavens foretell is the fate of man fulfilled. I bring this news to Hasjarl and Gwaay, the sons of Quarmal."

With a swift motion Flindach plucked a slender parchment tube from his belt, and breaking it with his hands dropped it crumpled at his feet. In almost the same gesture he reached behind his left shoulder and stepping from the shadow of the arch drew a peaked cowl over his head.

Throwing wide both arms Flindach spoke, his voice seeming to come from afar:

"Quarmal, Lord of Quarmall, rules no more. The casting is fulfilled. Let all within the walls of Quarmall mourn. For three days the place of the Lord of Quarmall will be vacant. So custom demands and so shall it be. On the morrow, when the sun enters his courtyard, that which remains of what was once a great

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and puissant lord will be given to the flames. Now I got to mourn my Master and oversee the obsequies and prepare myself with fasting and with prayer for his passing. Do you likewise."

Flindach slowly turned and disappeared into the darkness from which he had come.

For the space of full ten heartbeats Gwaay and Hasjarl sat motionless. The announcement came as a thunderclap to both. Gwaay for a second felt an impulse to giggle and smirk like a child who has unexpectedly escaped punishment and is instead rewarded; but in the back of his mind he was half-convinced that he had known all along the outcome of the casting. However he controlled his childish glee and sat silent, staring.

On the other hand Hasjarl reacted as might be expected of him. He went through a series of outlandish grimaces and ended with an obscene half-smothered titter. Then he frowned, and turning said to Gwaay, "Heard you not what said Flindach? I must go and prepare myself!" and he lurched to his feet and paced silently across the room, out the broad-arched door.

Gwaay remained sitting for another few moments, frowning eyes narrowed in concentration, as if he were puzzlig over some abstruse problem which required all his powers to solve. Suddenly he snapped his fingers and motioning for his slaves to proceed him made ready for his return to the Lower Levels, whence he had come.

* * *

FAFHRD had barely left the Ghost Hall when he heard the rattle and clink of armed men moving over-cautiously. His bemusement with Friska's charms vanished as if he had been doused with ice water. He shrank into the deeper darkness and eavesdropped long enough to learn that these were pickets of Hasjarl, guarding against an invasion from Gwaay's Lower Levels—and not tracking down Friska and himself as he'd first feared. Then he made off swiftly for Hasjarl's Hall of Sorcery, grimly pleased that his memory for landmarks and turnings seemed to work as well for mazy tunnels as for forest trails and steep zig-zag mountain escalades.

The bizarre sight that greeted him when he reached his goal stopped him on the stony threshold. Standing sin-deep and stark naked in a steaming marble tub shaped like a ridgy seashell, Hasjarl was berating and haranging the great roomful around him. And every man jack of them—sorcerers, officers, overseers, pages bearing great

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fringy towels and dark red robes and other apparel—was standing quakingly still with cringing eyes, except for the three slaves soaping and laving their Lord with tremulous dexterity.

Fafhrd had to admit that Hasjarl naked was somehow more consistent—ugly everywhere—a kobold birthed from a hot-spring. And although his grotesque child-pink torso and mismated arms were a-writhe and a-twitch in a frenzy of apprehension, he had dignity of a sort.

He was snarling, "Speak, all of you, is there a precaution I have forgot, a rite omitted, a rathole overlooked that Gwaay might creep through? Oh that on this night when demons lurk and I must mind a thousand things and dress me for my father's obsequies, I should be served by wittols! Are you all deaf and dumb? Where's my great champion, who should ward me now? Where are my scarlet grommets? Less soap there, you—take that! You, Essem, are we guarded well above?—I don't trust Flindach. And Yissim, have we guards enough below?—Gwaay is a snake who'll strike through any gap. Dark Gods, defend me! Go to the barracks, Yissim, get more men, and reinforce our downward guards—and while you're there, I mind me now, bid them continue Friska's torture. Wring the truth from her! She's in Gwaay's plots—this night has made me certain. Gwaay knew my father's death was imminent and laid invasion plans long weeks agone. Any of you may be his purchased spies! Oh where's my champion? *Where are my scarlet grommets?*"

Fafhrd, who'd been striding forward, quickened his pace at mention of Friska. A simple inquiry at the torture chamber would reveal her escape and his part in it. He must create diversions. So he halted close in front of pink wet steaming Hasjarl and said boldly,

"Here is your champion, Lord. And he counsels not sluggy defence, but some swift stroke at Gwaay! Surely your mighty mind has fashioned many a shrewd attacking stratagem. Launch you a thunderbolt!"

IT WAS all Fafhrd could do to keep speaking forcefully to the end and not let his voice trail off as his attention became engrossed in the strange operation now going on. While Hasjarl crouched stockstill with head a-twist, an ashen-faced bath-slave had drawn out Hasjarl's left upper eyelid by its lashes and was inserting into the hole in it a tiny flanged scarlet ring or grommet no bigger than a lentil. The grommet was carried on the tip

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of an ivory wand thin as a straw and the whole deed was being done by the slave with the anxiety of a man refilling the poison pouches of a unthethered rattlesnake—if such an action might be imagined for purposes of comparison.

However, the operation was quickly completed, and then on the right eye too—and evidently with perfect satisfaction, since Hasjarl did not slash the slave with the soapy wet lash still adangle from his wrist—and when Hasjarl straightened up he was grinning broadly at Fafhrd.

"You counsel me well, champion," he cried. "These other fools could do nothing but shake. There *is* a stroke long-planned that I'll try now, one that won't violate the obsequies. Essem, take slaves and fetch the dust—you know the stuff I mean—and meet me at the vents! Boy, give me my slippers and my toweling robe!—those other clothes can wait. Follow me, Fafhrd!"

But just then his red-grommeted gaze lit on his four-and-twenty bearded and hooded sorcerers standing apprehensive by their chairs.

"Back to your charms at once, you ignoramuses!" he roared at them. "I did not tell you stop because I bathed! Back to your charms and send your plagues at Gwaay—red, black and green, nose-drip and bloody rot—or I will burn your beards off to the eyelashes as prelude to more dire torturings! Haste, Essem! Come, Fafhrd!"

* * *

THE GREY MOUSER at that same moment was returning from his closet with Ivivis when Gwaay, velvet-shod and followed by barefoot slaves, came around a turn in the dim corridor so swiftly there was no evading him.

The young Lord of the Lower Levels seemed preternaturally calm and controlled, yet with the impression that under the calm was naught but quivering excitement and darting thought—so much so that it would hardly have surprised the Mouser if there had shone forth from Gwaay an aura of Blue Essence of Thunderbolt. Indeed, the Mouser felt his skin begin to prickle and sting, as if just such an influence were invisibly streaming from his employer.

Gwaay scanned the Mouser and the pretty slave-girl in a flicker and spoke, his voice dancing rapid and gaysome.

"Well, Mouser, I can see you've sampled your reward ahead of time. Ah, youth and dim retreats and pillowed dreams and amorous hostessings—what else gilds life or makes it worth the guttering sooty candle? Was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the girl skillful? Good! Ivivis, dear, I must reward your zeal. I gave Divis a necklace—would you one? Or I've a brooch shaped like a scorpion, ruby-eyed—"

The Mouser felt the girl's hand quiver and chill in his and he cut in quickly with, "My demon speaks to me, Lord Gwaay, and tells me it's a night when the Fates walk."

Gwaay laughed. "Your demon has been listening behind the arras. He's heard tales of my father's swift departure." As he spoke a drop formed at the end of his nose, between his nostrils. Fascinated, the Mouser watched it grow. Gwaay started to lift the back of his hand to it, then shook it off instead. For an instant he frowned, then laughed again.

"Aye, the Fates trod on Quarmall Keep tonight," Gwaay said, only now his gay rapid voice was a shade hoarse.

"My demon whispers me further that there are dangerous powers abroad this night," the Mouser continued.

"Aye, brother love and such," Gwaay quipped in reply, but now his voice was a corak. A look of great startlement widened his eyes. He shivered as with a chill and drops pattered from his nose. Three hairs fell across his eyes. His slaves shrank back from him.

"My demon warns me we'd best use my Great Spell quickly against those powers," the Mouser went on, his mind returning as always to Sheelba's untested rune. "It destroys only sorcerers of the Second Rank and lower. Yours, being of the First Rank, will be untouched. But Hasjarl's will perish."

Gwaay opened his mouth to reply, but no words came forth, only a moaning nightmarish groan like that of a mute. Hectic spots shone forth high on his checks, and now it seemed to the Mouser that a reddish blotch was crawling up the right side of his chin, while on the left black spots were forming. A hideous stench became apparent. Gwaay staggered and his eyes brimmed with a greenish ichor. He lifted his hand to them and its back was yellowish crusted and red-cracked. His slave ran.

"Hasjarl's sendings!" the Mouser hissed. "Gwaay's sorcerers still sleep! I'll rouse 'em! Support him, Ivivis!" And turning he sped like the wind down corridor and up ramp until he reached Gwaay's Hall of Sorcery. He entered it clapping and whistling harsh between his teeth, for true enough the twelve scrawny loin-clothed mages were still curled snoring on their wide high-backed chairs. The Mouser darted to each in turn, righting and shaking him with no gentle hands and shouting in his ear,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"To your work! Anti-venom! Guard Gwaay!"

ELEVEN of the sorcerers roused quickly enough and were soon staring wide-eyed at nothingness, though with their bodies rocking and their heads bobbing for a while from the Mouser's shaking—like eleven small ships just overpassed by a squall.

He was having a little more trouble with the twelfth, though this one was coming awake, soon would be doing his share, when Gwaay appeared of a sudden in the archway with Ivivis at his side, though not supporting him. The young Lord's face gleamed as silver clear in the dimness as the massy silver mask of him that hung in the niche above the arch.

"Stand aside, Gray Mouser, I'll jog the sluggard," he cried in a rippingly bright voice and snatching up a small obsidian jar tossed it toward the drowsy sorcerer.

It should have fallen no more than halfway between them. Did he mean to wake the ancient by its shattering? the Mouser wondered. But then Gwaay stared at it in the air and it quickened its speed fearfully. It was as if he had tossed up a ball, then batted it. Shooting forward like a bolt fired point-blank from a sinewy catapult it shattered the ancient's skull and spattered the chair and the Mouser with his brains.

Gwaay laughed, a shade high-pitched, and cried lightly, "I must curb my excitement! I must! I must! Sudden recovery from two dozen deaths—or twenty-three and the Nose Drip—is no reason for a philosopher to lose control. Oh I'm a giddy fellow!"

Ivivis cried suddenly, "The room swims! I see silver fish!"

The Mouser felt dizzy himself then and saw a phosphoresent green hand reach through the archway toward Gwaay—reach out on a thin arm that lengthened to yards. He blinked hard and the hand was gone—but now there were swimmings of purple vapor.

He looked at Gwaay and that one, frowny-eyed now, was sniffing hard and then sniffing again, though no new drop could be seen to have formed on his nose-end.

* * *

FAFHRD stood three paces behind Hasjarl, who looked in his bunched and high-collared robe of earth-brown toweling rather like an ape.

Beyond Hasjarl on the right there trotted on a thick wide roller-riding leather belt three slaves of monstrous aspect:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

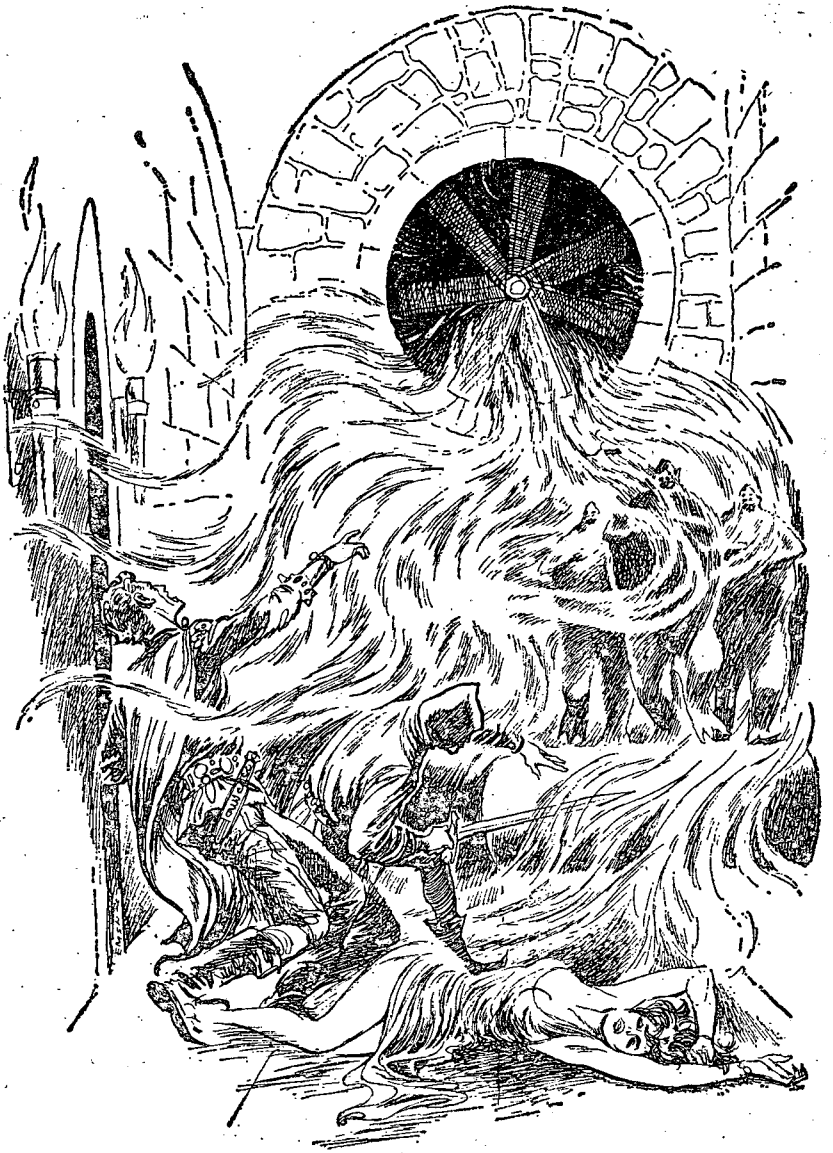
great splayed feet, legs like an elephant's, huge furnace-bellows chests, dwarfy arms, pinheads with wide toothy mouths and with nostrils bigger than their eyes or ears—creatures bred to run ponderously and nothing else. The moving belt disappeared with a half twist into a vertical cylinder of masonry five yards across and re-emerged just below itself, but moving in the opposite direction, to pass under the rollers and complete its loop. From within the cylinder came the groaning of the great wooden fan which the belt whirled and which drove life-sustaining air downward to the Lower Levels.

Beyond Hasjarl on the left was a small door set high as Fafhrd's head in the cylinder. To it there mounted one by one, up four narrow masonry steps, a line of dusky great-headed dwarfs. Each bore on his shoulder a dark bag which when he reached the window he untied and emptied into the clamorous shaft, shaking it out most thoroughly while he held it inside, then folding it and leaping down to give place to the next bag-bearer.

Hasjarl leered over his shoulder at Fafhrd. "A nosegay for Gwaay!" he cried. " 'Tis a king's ransom I strew on the downward gale: powder of poppy, dust of lotus and mandragora, crumble of hemp. A million lewdly pleasant dreams, and all for Gwaay! Three ways this conquers him: he'll sleep a day and miss my father's funeral, then Quarmall's mine by right of sole appearance yet with no blood shed which would mar the rites; his sorcerers will sleep and my infectious spells burst through and strike him down in stinking jellied death; his realm will sleep, each slave and cursed page, we'll conquer all merely by marching down after the business of the funeral. Ho, swifter there!" And seizing a long whip from an overseer, he began to crack it over the squat cones of the tread-slaves' heads and sting their broad backs with it. Their trot changed to a ponderous gallop, the moan of the fan rose in pitch, and Fafhrd waited to hear it shatter crackingly, or see the belt snap, or the rollers break on their axles.

The dwarf at the shaft-window took advantage of Hasjarl's attention being elsewhere to snatch a pinch of powder from his bag and bring it to his nostrils and sniff it down, leering ecstatically. But Hasjarl saw and whipped him about the legs most cruelly. The dwarf dutifully emptied his bag and shook it out while making little hops of agony. However he did not seem much chastened or troubled by his whipping, for as he left the chamber Fafhrd saw him pull

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his empty bag down over his head and waddle off breathing deeply thorugh it.

Hasjarl went on whip-cracking and calling, "Swifter, I say! For Gwaay a drugged hurricane!"

The officer Yissim raced into the room and darted to his master.

"The girl Friska's escaped!" he cried. "Your torturers say your champion came with your seal, telling them you had ordered her release—and snatched her off! All this occurred a quarter day ago."

"Guards!" Hasjarl squealed. "Seize the Northerner! Disarm and bind the traitor!"

But Fafhrd was gone.

* * *

THE MOUSER, in company with Ivivis, Gwaay and a colorful rabble of drug-induced hallucinations, reeled into a chamber similar to the one from which Fafhrd had just disappeared. Here the great cylindrical shaft ended in a half turn. The fan that sucked down the air and blew it out to refresh the Lower Levels was set vertically in the mouth of the shaft and was visible as it whirled.

By the shaft-mouth hung a large cage of white birds, all lying on its floor with their feet in the air. Besides these tell-tales, there was stretched on the floor of the chamber its overseer, also overcome by the drugs whirlwinding from Hasjarl.

By contrast, the three pillar-legged slaves ponderously trotting their belt seemed not affected at all. Presumably their tiny brains and monstrous bodies were beyond the reach of any drug, short of its lethal dose.

Gwaay staggered up to them, slapped each in turn, and commanded, "Stop!" Then he himself dropped to the floor.

The groaning of the fan died away, its seven wooden vanes became clearly visible as it stopped (though for the Mouser they were interwoven with scaly hallucinations), and the only real sound was the slow gasping of the tread-slaves.

Gwaay smiled weirdly at them from where he sprawled and he raised an arm drunkenly and cried, "Reverse! About face!" Slowly the tread-slaves turned, taking a dozen tiny steps to do it, until they all three faced the opposite direction on the belt.

"Trot!" Gwaay commanded them quickly. Slowly they obeyed and slowly the fan took up again its groaning, but now it was blowing air up the shaft against Hasjarl's downward fanning.

Gwaay and Ivivis rested on the floor for a space, until their brains began to clear and the last hallucinations were chased from view. To the Mouser they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seemed to be sucked up the shaft through the fan blades: a filmy horde of blue and purple wraiths armed with transparent saw-toothed spears and cutlasses.

Then Gwaay, smiling in highest excitement with his eyes, said softly and still a bit breathlessly, "My sorcerers . . . were not overcome . . . I think. Else I'd be dying . . . Hasjarl's two-dozen deaths. Another moment . . . and I'll send across the level . . . to reverse the exhaust fan. We'll get fresh air through it. And put more slaves on this belt here—perhance I'll blow my brother's nightmares back to him. Then lave and robe me for my father's fiery funeral and mount to give Hasjarl a nasty shock.

He reached across the floor and grasped the Mouser strongly at the elbow. "You, Gray One," he whispered, "prepare to work this mighty rune of yours which will smite down Hasjarl's warlocks. Gather your simples, pray your demonic prayers—consulting first with my twelve archimages . . . if you can rouse the twelfth from his dark hell. As soon as Quarmal's lich is in the flames, I'll send you word to speak your deadly spell." He paused and his eyes gleamed with a witchy glare in the dimness. "The time has come for sorcery and swords!"

To Be Concluded

A Gorgeous Blonde—

A Post-Sputnik Soldier of Fortune—

These are the main ingredients in

Robert A. Heinlein's

NEW NOVEL

GLORY ROAD

The best book yet from the 2-time Hugo Award Winner

$3.95 at all bookstores, or from

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

200 Madison Ave., N.Y. 10016

We have a limited supply of back issues of FANTASTIC that can be ordered on a first come, first served basis. Fill in the coupon below, enclose your remittance in the amount of 65¢ per issue and mail.

ZIFF-DAVIS SERVICE DIVISION

Dept. BC, 589 Broadway
New York 12, New York

Please send the following back issues of FANTASTIC.

I am enclosing _____ to cover cost of the magazine, shipping and handling.

Month _____ Year _____

Month _____ Year _____

Month _____ Year _____

Address _____

Name _____

City _____ **Zone** ____ **State** _____

No charge or C.O.D. orders please.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By DOBBIN THORPE

Illustrator LUTJENS

Once upon a time there was a little girl named Gretel. And a witch in the woods. But if you transfer the story from an ancient world to a modern one, certain . . . changes . . . occur.

GRETEL was caught in the bright net of autumn—wandering vaguely in the golden, dying woods, vaguely uncertain where she was but not yet frightened, vaguely disobedient. Ripe gooseberries piled in her basket; the long grass drying. Autumn. She was seven years old.

The woods opened onto a vegetable garden. A scarecrow waved the raggedy stumps of his denim arms at the crows rustling in the cornstalk sheaves. Pumpkins and squash dotted the spent earth, as plump and self-sufficient as a convention of slum landlords. Further down the row, an old woman was rooting in the ground, mumbling to herself.

Gretel backed toward the wood. She was afraid. A strand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of rusted barb-wire snagged at her dress. The crows took to the air with graceless to-do. The woman pushed herself up and brushed back a tangle of greasy white hair. She squinted at Gretel, who began to cry.

"Little girl?" Her voice crackled like sticks of dry wood burning. "Little girl, come here. I give you some water, eh? You get lost in the woods."

Gretel tore her dress loose from the barb and stepped nervously around the fat pumpkins, tripping on their vines. Her fear, as is often the way with fear, made her go to the old woman, to the thing she feared.

"Yes, I know you," the old woman grated. "You live two houses down the road. I know your mother when she is little." She winked, as though they had shared an amusing secret. "How old are you?"

Gretel opened her mouth but couldn't speak.

"You're only a *little* girl," the old woman went on, with a trace of contempt. "You know how old I am? A hundred years old!" She nodded her head vigorously. "I'm Minnie Haeckel."

Gretel had known who the woman was, although she had never seen her before. Whenever Gretel was especially bad or muddied her Sunday frock or wouldn't eat dinner, her mother would tell her what terrible things Old Minnie Haeckel did to naughty piglets who didn't eat cauliflower. Mother always concluded these revelations with the same warning: "You do it *once more*, and I'm going to take you to live with that old Minnie. It's just what you deserve." Now too, Gretel recognized the clapboard house with the peeling paint and, around it, the sheds—omens of a more thorough disintegration. The house was not as formidable viewed across the vegetable garden as it had seemed in brief glimpses from the car window, the white hulk looming behind a veil of dusty lilacs. It looked rather like the other old farmhouses along the gravel road—the Brandts', the Andersons'.

Minnie took Gretel by the hand and led her to an iron pump. The pump groaned in time to the woman's slow heave and stagger and a trickle of water spilt over its gray lip, blackening it.

"Silly girl!" Minnie gasped. "Use the dipper."

Gretel put the enamel dipper under the lip of the pump to catch the first gush of cold water. She drank greedily.

From inside the house, there was the bellow of a man's voice. "Minnie! Minnie, is that you?"

Minnie jerked the dipper out of Gretel's hand and bent over the little girl. "That's my broth-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er," she whispered, her dry voice edged with fear. "You must go. First, I give you something." Minnie took Gretel to a sagging wooden platform at the back of the house, where there was a pile of heavy, dirt-crusted tubers the color of bacon grease. Minnie put one of these in Gretel's basket on top of the tiny green gooseberries.

"Minnie!" the voice roared.

"Yeah, yeah!" Minnie returned. "Now then, that's for you. You give it to your mother, understand? And walk home down the road. It's not far. You know how?"

Gretel nodded. She backed away from Minnie and, when she was far enough, turned and ran to the road, clutching the basket with its terrible vegetable to her chest.

MOTHER was outside the house, collapsed in a lawn chair. The radio was turned on full-volume. Mother flexed her polished toes to the slow, urban beat of the music.

"Did you bring in the mail, love?" Mother asked. Gretel shook her head and stood at a distance from her mother, waiting to recover her breath.

"I tore my dress," she brought out at last. But Mother was not in a mood to be upset by small things. It was a very old dress and it had been torn before.

"What's in your basket, love?" she asked. Gretel glanced down guiltily at the hard, ominous vegetable. She handed it to her mother.

"I was picking gooseberries."

"This isn't a gooseberry, though," Mother explained gently. "It's a rutabaga. Where did you get it."

Gretel told about Minnie.

"Isn't that nice of her. She's such a sweet old lady. We'll have the rutabaga for dinner. Did you thank her, I hope?"

Gretel blushed. "I was afraid."

"There was nothing to be afraid of, love. Minnie is a harmless, old woman. She does the sweetest things sometimes, and she's had a hard time of it, living all alone in that firetrap of a house that really should be torn down. . . ."

"But she's not alone, Mommie. Her brother lives there with her."

"Nonsense, Gretel. Minnie doesn't have any brother, not any more. Now, put the rutabaga and the gooseberries in the kitchen and go back and see if there's any mail."

At dinner Gretel ate everything on her plate but the diced rutabagas. She sat staring at the yellowish lumps morosely, while her mother cleared away the dishes.

"You're not to leave the table until you've eaten every one of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them, so take all the time you need."

Finally, at eight o'clock, Gretel bolted down the cold, foul-tasting lumps of rutabaga, fighting against her reflex to gag. When she had quite finished, Mother brought in her desert, but Gretel couldn't eat it.

"Really, Gretel darling, there's no reason to *cry*."

The next day, Gretel was sick. Purely for spite, her mother was convinced. But, of course, that wasn't it at all. It was only the spell beginning its work.

LEFT to her own devices, Gretel would not have renewed her acquaintance with Minnie Haeckel. Unfortunately, late in October, Grandfather Bricks died; her mother's father, who had built the farmhouse they were living in. Mother was to meet Daddy in the city and then fly to California, where the Bricks had retired. Gretel, who was too young to attend a cremation, was deposited at Minnie Haeckel's doorstep with a canvas bag of playthings and a parting kiss. She watched her mother drive down the gravel road until there was nothing to be seen but a cloud of dust and a glint of chrome from the last hill of the horizon. Minnie was hunched over a sway-backed chair on the front stoop.

"Your old grandfather is dead, eh? He used to bring Minnie a fruitcake at Christmas." Minnie sucked in her cheeks and made a sound of regret. "People are always dying. What do you think of that?" Gretel noticed with distaste that the old woman's mouth contained, instead of proper teeth, brown stumps at irregular intervals that Gretel surmised were snuff. Her mother had told her once that Minnie chewed snuff.

"Come into the parlor, child. You can play there. Nobody uses the parlor nowadays."

The creaking pine floor was covered with a rag rug. There was a huge leather chair that rocked on hidden springs and a handsome mahogany table with a lace cloth. The bay window was hung with curtains that had once been feedbags, their red check now a sunbleached, dusty pink. On the walls, decades of calendars advertised the First Commercial Bank of Onamia. They pictured a perpetual *January* of wintry woods and snowy roads, ponds and icebound houses.

"Can you read?"

"A little."

Minnie opened a tin box that lay on the table and handed Gretel a small bundle of cards and envelopes. They smelled of decayed spices. Minnie shook the box. A gritty black ball rolled into Gretel's lap.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You take an apple," Minnie explained, "and you stick it full of cloves and let it dry for a whole year. It shrinks up like this. Doesn't it smell nice?" Minnie picked up the black ball and held it under her nostrils, smelling it noisily. "You read the letters now, eh?"

The first was a postcard showing a ship. *"Dear All,"* she read. *"I am in France. It gets cold at night, but I don't mind it. How is everyone? They say the war is almost over."* The signature, like the text, was printed in crude, black letters—*"Lew."*

"My daddy was in the war, too. He flew a plane."

"This is a different war, a long time ago."

The next postcard had no picture. GREETINGS FROM NEW YORK, it said in front. On the back there was only Lew's clumsy signature.

"Who is Lew?" Gretel asked. "Does he live upstairs?"

"Yes, but you can't see him. He can't walk now and he doesn't like little girls. Read some more, eh? The big one."

Gretel took the largest envelope and opened it. The letter was typewritten and crinkly with age. *"Dear Miss . . .* Is that how you spell *Haeckel?"* She giggled at the vagaries of spelling. *"We re—gret to inform you that your brother, Lew Haeckel, has been . . ."*

"Go on," Minnie prodded. "The words are too hard."

"You can't read very well."

"I'm only in first grade. Read them yourself."

"This letter is from the hospital. He was there for weeks. Then they sent him home. It costs me a lot of money."

"What happened?" Gretel asked, although she was not terribly interested.

"He used to drink." Minnie looked at Gretel narrowly. "Your mother drinks too, eh?" Gretel thought so. "He was in a car accident. That's what happens to drinkers. You stay in here while I work outside, eh? Then we eat."

Gretel promised to be good. Minnie replaced the letter in their box carefully and went out through the kitchen. Gretel climbed into the largest leather rocker and pumped it with her body, like a swing, until she had filled the room comfortably with its creaking. The corners of the parlor sank into shadow and the deep colors of the room deepened with dusk. Gretel rocked the chair harder, but it was a poor defense against the encroaching darkness. And there was no light switch on the wall. She went to find Minnie.

THE hall was even darker, and darker yet the staircase to the second floor. Piles of mail-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

order catalogues and old magazines formed a sort of bannister on the stairs.

"Hey—you!" He had a smooth, urgent voice. Gretel peeked up the stairs at him shyly. He was fat and he could hardly stand up. In the dark, Gretel could make out few details. He was leaning against the wall for support with one hand. With the other, he waved a cane at Gretel, as though he would catch her in its crook. "Come up here. I want to talk to you. Don't be afraid. C'mon, sugar."

"I'm not supposed to see you." Gretel liked to tease.

"Don't pay attention to Minnie. She's crazy, you know. I'll tell you a thing or two about *her*." Then his voice hushed so that Gretel couldn't understand his words. She advanced up two of the steps.

"That's right. C'mon in to my room. In here." He vanished from the top of the stairs, and Gretel listened to him shuffle along the corridor. She followed him and was relieved to see a shaft of light in the corridor.

His room was a sty of cast-off clothes, out-of-date magazines, and tins full of cigar ashes and butts. These—and Lew—were all piled on the double-bed at the center of the room; there was no other furniture except a dresser without drawers upon which a kerosene lamp was burning. Lew, collapsed in the debris of the bed, was breathing heavily—pale cheeks billowed and slacked like a mechanical toy. His belly sagged out of a blue, navy-issue, knit sweater and his thighs had split through the seams of his trousers, which were fouled with weeks, months of use.

"She keeps me prisoner here. I can't get downstairs by myself. She won't let me go anywhere, see my friends."

Gretel stared in amazement—not at this confidence—at him.

"And she tries to starve me, too. C'mere, sugar. What's your name?"

"Gretel."

"Forty years! I've been a cripple in this leg for forty years. She doesn't let me out of her sight. Come over here and sit on the bed, why doncha? I don't bite."

Gretel didn't move from the doorway. Lew picked up his cane again and tried to hook her around the neck, playfully.

"You afraid of your Old Uncle Lew?"

Gretel pursed her lips at what she knew to be a lie.

"You know why she does all this? You wanna know? She's a witch. That's what it is, honest to God. When she was a kid, she could take off warts. She's put her name down in the devil's book, and she'll never get any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

older now. And if she has a mind to, she can turn you into a mouse. You'll have to hop on her thumb and beg for crumbs of bread. You can hear her mumbling all the time, sorts of crazy things. Charms and such. And cursing, oh, she can curse." He stopped for breath again and struggled to his feet. Gretel backed further away.

"She hexed me. I was a thousand miles away, I was in New York. But that don't matter one iota to *her*. She made my leg go bum." He staggered forward angrily. *"It's all her fault!"* he shouted after Gretel as she clambered down the stairs and out of the house. Minnie was nowhere to be seen.

Gretel found her in one of the lean-to sheds shoveling corncobs into a tin bucket. "It's dark inside," she complained. She had decided not to mention Uncle Lew.

"There are rats in the sheds as big as you are," Minnie said between shovelsfull. "You only see them at night. Big rats."

"What are those?" Gretel pointed.

"Corncobs. I burn them up and they never get used. Every day I burn some more." She laughed, although Gretel did not recognize it as such. "Now we go inside. I turn on a lamp."

The kitchen table and the cupboards were stacked with unwashed dishes and pans. Minnie, apparently, had as little use for soap as Lew. Minnie lighted the kerosene lamp and made a fire in the stove. They ate dinner in silence: vegetables from Minnie's garden and canned meat from Mother's larder. Minnie ate with a spoon, but she offered Gretel a fork as well.

"Nibble, nibble, little mouse," Minnie chortled.

Gretel looked up at Minnie with delight, for she remembered the line. "Who is nibbling at my house?" she concluded. Minnie looked at her suspiciously. "Mommie read me that story lots of times. My name is in it—Gretel."

"What are you talking about? You want some cake, eh?"

The cake tasted nothing at all like the ones Mother took from boxes, but it wasn't bad. Gretel had two pieces.

"I take you home now. I come and get you in the morning. You can't sleep here."

Gretel kept close to Minnie on the gravel road, but she wouldn't hold the old woman's hand. Even with a sweater, it was cold. Owls hooted in the dark woods, and there were other, less definite noises.

"You're afraid of the dark, eh?"

"It's scary at night."

"I like the night best of all. I build a fire in the stove and sit

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down and warm my old bones. When you go back to the city?"

"Daddy has to find a new apartment. I'm studying my lessons at home. I can read anyhow. Most first-graders can't read at all."

"Here you are. You want me to put you to bed?"

"No. We have electric lights, so I won't be afraid by myself. Minnie?"

"Eh?"

"Are you really a witch?"

Minnie choked on her phlegm and spat and choked again. This time Gretel knew her laughter for what it was. She went into the house angrily and locked the door behind her. Even upstairs in her chintz bedroom she could hear Minnie, as she walked back along the road, rasping with glee and mumbling—something—loudly.

THE morning drizzled—cold, a clothes-damping mist that did not fall but hung, filmed the house and leafless trees but would not wet the earth. Gretel was awakened by a tattoo of pebbles on the clouded window. She dressed herself, sleepily, in the warmest clothes she could find and joined Minnie outside, wishing that her mother were there with the Buick. While they trudged down the road, Minnie interrupted her grumbling long enough to ask Gretel if she had been with her brother the day before.

"Yes. He told me to. And he said you were a witch. Can you take off warts?"

"I stop the toothache too—and measles. Once, I am at every laying-in but no more. They come to Old Minnie for a love-doll, for a sick horse. For everything."

Gretel considered this in silence. She did not quite dare to ask if Minnie could turn children into mice. She remembered, with grave suspicion, the rats in the corncrib that only came out at night—rats as big as she herself. She felt serious and wary but no longer afraid. And she felt, too, though she could not have said why, a touch of contempt for the old woman shuffling through the mist, bent under the oversized pea-jacket.

"Aren't we going to your house?" Gretel asked as they walked past the dripping lilac bushes.

"Not now. You are warm enough, eh?"

"Is it far?"

"Not far." Half a mile didn't seem far to Minnie. A dirt track led from the road to the Onamie Township Cemetery. Minnie paced in a circle about a small stone that rose bare inches above the clovered grass. There was an inscription on it which read simply:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HAECKEL
1898-1923.

Three times she circled it, crooning anxiously, and then three times again, but in the other direction.

"Who's inside?" Gretel asked, but Minnie wasn't listening to her ward. "My grandfather," she persisted, "is going to be burned. Mommie is bringing the ashes home in a jar. Is that your brother?"

Minnie finished her pacing and started back to the road, still oblivious of Gretel. Gretel was piqued. She considered hiding from her unresponsive guardian, as she had often hid from her mother when she (her mother) needed to be punished, but it was too cold and wet a day to go into the woods. Gretel would remember not to forget.

Minnie's stove was already crackling; the kitchen was soaked in a warmth that drew a history of odors from the cracks in the woodwork: smells of last year's apples and this summer onions, of nutmeg and cinammon, the scrapings of stews, the coffee burnt on the iron stove, the musk of drying wood in the orangecrate by the stove, of snuff, and strangely, of cigars. There was a wooden sign above the porch door, painted in crude, black letters. Gretel sounded them out—CIGAR FACTORY NO. 4.

"Is this a cigar factory?"

"Not any more. My brother makes cigars before he is too sick. It makes a little money. It is a good thing to make some money. I sell vegetables in town. And go to the sick people. It isn't much. He makes them just to smoke nowadays. I have to sell the land sometimes."

"Has your brother lived here a long time?"

"Oh, a long time. Can you cook?"

"Mommie won't let me. I'm too little."

"I teach you to make cookies, eh? Little cookies—just for you."

"Okay. Is he as old as you are?"

"We don't talk about him now. What is this, eh?"

Gretel shrugged at the handfull of white powder Minnie had taken from a glass cannister.

"Silly girl. It's flour. Everyone knows flour." Minnie put three more handsfull of flour into a mixing bowl. "First, you put the sugar with the lard. Then, the flour."

"Ich."

Undaunted, Minnie detailed all the rest of the steps in making the dough. Without cups and measuring spoons, Gretel was doubtful if the results would be edible. "What *is* it?" she asked, losing all patience.

"It's gingerbread. You don't know anything."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gretel gasped. Gingerbread. She stuck her finger into the magic, brown dough and tasted it. Like swan or mermaids, like nighttime or a candy cottage with panes of sugar. She gloated at the forbidden, old sweetness.

"You don't eat it yet. We roll it out on the table and you can cut out the people. Little gingerbread girls, eh? then we bake it. *Then* we eat."

"Aren't *you* going to make anything?" Gretel asked cautiously.

"I have a cutter. I show you." Minnie dug through a drawer of unfamiliar-looking utensils and drew forth a cookie-cutter in triumph.

"What is it?"

"*It's a rabbit.*"

Gretel examined it closely, first on the outside, then its cutting edge. *"It's a toad!"*

Minnie backed away from the little girl. She cocked her head to one side.

"Tell me about the rats," Gretel said anxiously. She came over to Minnie and took her hand. "Are they *very* big? As big as me? Are there a lot of them? *Tell me!*"

"I don't know what you're saying." Minnie began to cough. It was not a laughing cough.

"You don't want to tell me, do you." The old woman lowered herself onto a stool, bent double with the pain that spread across her chest and into her stomach. Gretel put her hands on Minnie's shoulders and pushed her back up to stare intently into her rheumy eyes. "Why is he alive? How did you make him come alive again?"

"Devil's child!" Minnie screamed. "Leave me be!"

"He died. A long time ago. I know. You showed me the letter. It said he died. Killed—I read it."

Minnie pushed Gretel away from her and ran out the kitchen door. For a moment she stood, uncertain, in the mist, then walked at a quick hobble to the road, turned toward the cemetery.

IT had happened months before, in spring, while she helped Mother in the flower garden. Squeezing the clods of earth between her hands until, sudden as the pop of a balloon, they broke between her fingers in a sift of loam—enjoyable. Then, one, as she squeezed, squished. Dried mud flaked from back and belly, and Gretel had found, locked tight in her two hands, the toad. Her fear was not of warts; she had not heard that a toad's touch bred warts. Gretel had been spared many of the old-wive's tales: her mother's urbane imagination fed on cancer, heart disease, and, more recently, thalidomide. Gretel's fear was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

greater and less definite—without specific remedy. Through the summer, it sank malignant roots in the country soil, hung like pollen in the air, infected the water in the pumps. She seeded the country-side with her fear, subdued but ready to spring to her pale blue eyes, like a rabbit started from its hole, at the slightest provocation. Diffuse, private, echoing the bedtime legends—the Grimms and Andersons—that then composited their several horrors in her own dreams: an enchantment.

Yet, she was not helpless. She had a natural talent for exorcism. She was thorough, and she could be ruthless. And if fear could not be circumvented, it could be joined.

Without haste or bravado then, Gretel climbed the stairs once more. She tiptoed through the hall and inched open the door to Lew Haeckel's room. He was there, sleeping. A thread of brown saliva rolled out the side of his mouth. Gretel raised the blind, and a hazy, gray light spilled into the room, across the double-bed, beneath his eyelids.

"Whadaya want?" He raised himself on one elbow, blinking. "Why, hello sugar."

"Minnie's making gingerbread," Gretel announced.

"Well, she's not making any for *me*." Lew looked at Gretel cannily. "What's wrong, kid?"

"Is she a witch, really?"

"You bet your life she is."

"And the mouse . . ."

Slowly, Lew began to understand. His fat lips curled into a smile, showing brown teeth like Minnie's. "Oh, she can do that, too. You think she's up to something?" He looked around nervously. "Where is she?"

"She went . . . outside." Gretel did not dare mention the cemetery. "She made dough, but she hasn't made the cookies yet. She's going to make a *toad*."

"With the gingerbread, huh? A gingerbread toad?"

Gretel nodded.

"And you're afraid. Well, you can beat her at witching. She's pretty dumb, you know. For a witch." He began to speak more softly. "You think she'll turn you into a toad? Is that it, honey?" Gretel crept closer to the bed to hear what he was whispering. "She can do that. A black toad hopping in the mud. You wouldn't like that, a pretty girl like you." A chuckle, soft and lewd. "You've got to watch out for that gingerbread. I'll tell you what . . ." His voice was a wisp of sound. Gretel stood at his bedside, frozen with attention. "You go downstairs and take that dough, and make a cookie like Minnie . . ." His hand snaked out to circle her waist. She was too horrified at his implications to notice.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"*And eat it!*" she exclaimed.

"That's right, sugar. Then you don't have to worry about any old gingerbread toad. You'll take the wind out of her sails, all right."

He held her firmly now, pulled her closer to him.

"You're a pretty little girl, you know that? How about a kiss for your old Uncle Lew, seeing as how he's helped you out?"

"Let go." She tried to pull his hand away. His face bent toward hers, smiling. "Let me go! I know about you. Stop it!"

"Whadaya know, huh?"

"You're *dead,*" Gretel screamed. "They buried you. Minnie is there now. You were killed. Dead."

THE man's hulk shook with something like laughter. His grip loosened. Gretel broke away and retreated to the doorway. He quieted suddenly, although his body continued to tremble like a tree in a light breeze. He pulled himself up in his bed and spat into one of the tin cans.

"You're great, kid. You'll be the greatest witch yet. No fooling." When Gretel was halfway down the stairs, he called out after her—"We'll get along, sugar. You and me. Just wait." A drop of blood fell from Gretel's lip where she had been biting it. It made a blot on her jumper, the size of a pea.

In the kitchen, she rolled out the dough, according to Minnie's instructions, and cut out a five-inch witch with a greasy knife. The gingerbread witch stuck to the table. She scraped it free with the knife and reassembled it on the cookie sheet, which Minnie had already prepared. She took three raisins from the bag on the table and gave the gingerbread figure eyes and a black mouth—like Minnie's. She put the cookie sheet in the oven and nibbled fingers of the raw dough while she waited.

She brought the cookie sheet out of the oven. The witch was a rich brown on top, but crisp and black underneath. She had still to wait for it to cool. She was afraid Minnie would return, and sat at the parlor window to watch the road. Upstairs, Gretel could hear Lew shuffling about.

And, then, in the kitchen. The gingerbread witch was warm but —Gretel touched her tongue to it —not too warm to eat, easier, too, if you closed your eyes. One bite beheaded her. The three raisins were cinders, too dry to chew. She rinsed down the rest of it with water.

Outside the window, Gretel could see a wind spring out of the wood, tearing through the corn sheaves, striking the sodden clothes of the scarecrow, tumbling his hat into a furrow, lifting it into the air. Higher.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lew was standing in the doorway, holding to the frame. Except for a week's stubble of beard, his face was white as his shirt collar. He was wearing a suit that was moderately clean.

"You done it, sure as hell, sugar." He spoke in short bursts of breath. "As good as roast her on a spit and serve her up at a church supper with whipped potatoes and green peas."

"You told me to."

"I needed to get away from her, get some fresh blood. Run with the tide. Minnie was old-fashioned. She kept me prisoned here." He pointed out the window to the scarecrow. "But the spell's broke." He inhaled deeply; his belly lifted and fell. A spate of blood darkened his cheeks and ebbed away. "You and me, sugar, we're going places. You gonna kiss me *now*, for old time's?"

Gretel wrinkled her nose. "You're fat and ugly."

"That's how she wanted me. A witch always keeps something beside her—a cat, a mouse, a cricket maybe."

"Rats?"

"Rats too. Or a black toad." He grinned. Gretel shuddered. "But Minnie had to have something that looked like her brother—so she dug him up. I had to do all the work, dragging this hulk around."

"Go away."

"Not any more, sugar. I'm yours now. You outwitched her, but you've still got a lot to learn . . . and a lot of time to learn it. You're stuck with me, like it or not. And I like it."

"I don't want you." He shrugged and sat beside her at the table. The chair creaked under his weight. He wrapped his paw about her forearm. "You're ugly. You stink!" It was the harshest word she knew, but since it was, in this case, accurate, it seemed, like coffee made from used grounds, to lack full strength.

"If you don't like me the way I am, just say the word."

Gretel's eyes widened. "You mean. . . ."

"Gary Cooper," he suggested. "Fabian."

"No."

He leered. "—Bobby Kennedy?"

"No," Gretel said. "I want . . ."

GRETEL, for the sake of propriety, bundled into her warm clothes and set off for the cemetery to find Minnie. The clouds had cleared away but the sun they revealed was feeble, an invalid's sun.

"Come along, Hansel," she called to the lovely cocker spaniel pup. He ran to her with an obedient yip. A bead of saliva glistened on the tip of his distended black-pink tongue.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gretel glanced back once at the clapboard house that a grateful Township would soon—and at long last—have an opportunity to raze. It seemed to take forever to get to the cemetery.

Minnie was there under the poplar, where Gretel had expected her to be. The used-up body was draped indecorously over the stone. The half-hour of sunlight had dried the grass, but Minnie's wool dress was still damp and clinging. Her fingernails were caked with mud and shredded grass from digging around the stone. Hansel began to whine.

"Oh, shut up!" Gretel commanded.

He sat back on his haunches and watched a powerful, slow smile spread across his mistress' face.

THE END

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION *(Act of October 23, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code)*.

1. Date of Filing: October 1, 1963.
2. Title of Publication: Fantastic, Stories of Imagination.
3. Frequency of Issue: Monthly.
4. Location of Known Office of Publication: 1 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10016.
5. Location of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers: 1 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10016.
6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor:
   Publisher: Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 1 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016
   Editor: Cele Goldsmith, 1 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10016
7. Owner: Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 1 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016, Estate of William B. Ziff, 1 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016, A. M. Ziff, 1 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.
8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or other Securities: None.
9. Paragraphs 7 and 8 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Names and addresses of individuals who are stockholders of a corporation which itself is a stockholder or holder of bonds, mortgages or other securities of the publishing corporation have been included in paragraphs 7 and 8 when the interests of such individuals are equivalent to 1 percent or more of the total amount of the stock or securities of the publishing corporation.
10. This Item Must Be Completed For All Publications Except Those Which Do Not Carry Advertising Other Than The Publisher's Own And Which Are Named In Sections 132.231, 132.232 and 132.233, Postal Manual:

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Single Issue Nearest To Filing Date
A. Total No. Copies Printed (*Net Press Run*)	98,628	71,947
B. Paid Circulation		
1. To Term Subscribers By Mail, Carrier Delivery Or By Other Means.	917	972
2. Sales Through Agents, News Dealers of Otherwise.	31,638	31,400
C. Free Distribution (*including samples*) By Mail, Carrier Delivery, Or By Other Means.	637	629
D. Total No. Of Copies Distributed. (*Sum of lines B1, B2 and C*)	33,192	33,001

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Matthew T. Birmingham, Jr.
(Business Manager)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Festin the wizard flowed through earth, veins of granite for his bones, groundwater as his blood, roots of things for nerves, meeting death with death.

The Word of Unbinding

by

URSULA K. Le GUIN

WHERE was he? The floor was hard and slimy, the air black and stinking, and that was all there was. Except a headache. Lying flat on the clammy floor Festin moaned, and then said, "Staff!" When his alderwood wizard's staff did not come to his hand, he knew he was in peril. He sat up, and not having his staff with which to make a proper light, he struck a spark between finger and thumb, muttering a certain Word. A blue will o' the wisp sprang from the spark and rolled feebly through the air, sputtering. "Up," said Festin, and the fireball wobbled upward till it lit a vaulted trapdoor very high above, so high that Festin projecting into the fireball momentarily saw his own face forty feet below as a pale dot in the darkness. The light struck no reflections in the damp walls; they had been woven out of night, by magic. He rejoined himself and said, "Out." The ball expired. Festin sat in the dark, cracking his knuckles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He must have been overspelled from behind, by surprise; for the last memory he had was of walking through his own woods at evening talking with the trees. Lately, in these lone years in the middle of his life, he had been burdened with a sense of waste, of unspent strength; so, needing to learn patience, he had left the villages and gone to converse with trees, especially oaks, chestnuts, and the grey alders whose roots are in profound communication with running water. It had been six months since he had spoken to a human being, or even a gnome. He had been busy with essentials, casting no spells and bothering no one. So who had spellbound him and shut him in this reeking well? "Who?" he demanded of the walls, and slowly a name gathered on them and ran down to him like a thick black drop sweated out from pores of stone and spores of fungus: "Voll."

For a moment Festin was in a cold sweat himself.

He had heard first long ago of Voll the Fell, who was said to be more than wizard yet less than man; who passed from island to island of the Outer Reach, undoing the works of the Ancients, enslaving men, cutting forests and spoiling fields, and sealing in underground tombs any wizard or mage who tried to combat him. Refugees from ruined islands told always the same tale, that he came at evening on a dark wind over the sea. His slaves followed in ships, a band of huge rock-trolls; these they had seen. But none of them had ever seen Voll. . . . There were many men and creatures of evil will among the Islands, and Festin, a young warlock intent on his training, had not paid much heed to these tales of Voll the Fell. "I can protect this island," he had thought, knowing his untried power, and had returned to his oaks and alders, the sound of wind in their leaves, the rhythm of growth in their round trunks and limbs and twigs, the taste of sunlight on leaves or dark groundwater around roots.— Where were they now, the trees his old companions? Had Voll destroyed the forest?

AWAKE at last and up on his feet, Festin made two broad motions with rigid hands, shouting aloud a Name that would burst all locks and break open any man-made door. But these walls impregnated with night and the name of their builder did not heed, did not hear. The name re-echoed back clapping in Festin's ears so that he fell on his knees, hiding his head in his arms till the echoes died away in the vaults above him. Then, still shaken by the backfire, he sat brooding.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They were right; Voll was strong. Here on his own ground, within this spell-built dungeon, his magic would withstand any direct attack; and Festin's strength was halved by the loss of his staff. But not even his captor could take from him his powers, relative only to himself, of Projecting and Transforming. So, after rubbing his now doubly aching head, he transformed. Quietly his body melted away into a cloud of fine mist.

Lazy, trailing, the mist rose off the floor, drifting up along the slimy walls until it found, where vault met wall, a hairline crack. Through this, droplet by droplet, it seeped. It was almost all through the crack when a hot wind, hot as a furnace-blast, struck at it scattering the mist-drops, drying them. Hurriedly the mist sucked itself back into the vault, spiralled to the floor, took on Festin's own form and lay there panting. Transformation is an emotional strain to introverted warlocks of Festin's sort; when to that strain is added the shock of facing unhuman death in one's assumed shape, the experience becomes horrible. Festin lay for a while merely breathing. He was also angry with himself. It had been a pretty simple-minded notion to escape as a mist, after all. Every fool vampire knew that trick. Voll had probably just left a hot wind waiting. Festin gathered himself into a small black bat, flew up to the ceiling, retransformed into a thin stream of plain air, and seeped through the crack.

This time he got clear out and was blowing softly down the hall in which he found himself towards a window, when a sharp sense of peril made him pull together, snapping himself into the first small, coherent shape that came to mind—a gold ring. It was just as well. The hurricane of arctic air that would have dispersed his air-form in unrecallable chaos merely chilled his ring-form slightly. As the storm passed he lay on the marble pavement, wondering which form might get out the window quickest.

Too late, he began to roll away. An enormous blank-faced troll strode cataclysmically across the floor, stooped, caught the quick-rolling ring and picked it up in a huge limestone-like hand. The troll strode to the trapdoor, lifted it by an iron handle and a muttered charm, and dropped Festin down into the darkness. He fell straight for forty feet and landed on the stone floor—clink.

Resuming his true form he sat up, ruefully rubbing a bruised elbow. Enough of this transformation on an empty stomach. He longed bitterly for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his staff, with which he could have summoned up any amount of dinner. Without it, though he could change his own form and exert certain spells and powers, he could not transform or summon to him any material thing —neither lightning nor a lamb-chop.

"Patience," Festin told himself, and when he had got his breath he dissolved his body into the infinite delicacy of volatile oils, becoming the aroma of a frying lamb-chop. He drifted once more through the crack. The waiting troll sniffed suspiciously, but already Festin had regrouped himself into a falcon, winging straight for the window. The troll lunged after him, missed by yards, and bellowed in a vast stony voice, "The hawk, get the hawk!" Swooping over the enchanted castle towards his forest that lay dark to westward, sunlight and sea-glare dazzling his eyes, Festin rode the wind like an arrow. But a quicker arrow found him. Crying out, he fell. Sun and sea and towers spun around him and went out.

HE woke again on the dank floor of the dungeon, hands and hair and lips wet with his own blood. The arrow had struck his pinion as a falcon, his shoulder as a man. Lying still, he mumbled a spell to close the wound. Presently he was able to sit up, and recollect a longer, deeper spell of healing. But he had lost a good deal of blood, and with it, power. A chill had settled in the marrow of his bones which even the healing-spell could not warm. There was darkness in his eyes, even when he struck a will o' the wisp and lit the reeking air: the same dark mist he had seen, as he flew, overhanging his forest and the little towns of his land.

It was up to him to protect that land.

He could not attempt direct escape again. He was too weak and tired. Trusting his power too much, he had lost his strength. Now whatever shape he took would share his weakness, and be trapped.

Shivering with cold, he crouched there, letting the fireball sputter out with a last whiff of methane—marsh gas. The smell brought to his mind's eye the marshes stretching from the forest wall down to the sea, his beloved marshes where no men came, where in fall the swans flew long and level, where between still pools and reed-islands the quick, silent, seaward streamlets ran. Oh, to be a fish in one of those streams; or better yet to be farther upstream, near the springs, in the forest in the shadow of the trees, in the clear brown backwater under an alder's roots, resting hidden . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This was a great magic. Festin had no more performed it than has any man who in exile or danger longs for the earth and waters of his home, seeing and yearning over the doorsill of his house, the table where he has eaten, the branches outside the window of the room where he has slept. Only in dreams do any but the great Mages realize this magic of going home. But Festin, with the cold creeping out from his marrow into nerves and veins, stood up between the black walls, gathered his will together till it shone like a candle in the darkness of his flesh, and began to work the great and silent magic.

THE walls were gone. He was in the earth, rocks and veins of granite for bones, groundwater for blood, the roots of things for nerves. Like a blind worm he moved through the earth westward, slowly, darkness before and behind. Then all at once coolness flowed along his back and belly, a buoyant, unresisting, inexhaustible caress. With his sides he tasted the water, felt current-flow; and with lidless eyes he saw before him the deep brown pool between the great buttress-roots of an alder. He darted forward, silvery, into shadow. He had got free. He was home.

The water ran timelessly from its clear spring. He lay on the sand of the pool's bottom letting running water, stronger than any spell of healing, soothe his wound and with its coolness wash away the bleaker cold that had entered him. But as he rested he felt and heard a shaking and trampling in the earth. Who walked now in his forest? Too weary to try to change form, he hid his gleaming trout-body under the arch of the alder root, and waited.

Huge grey fingers groped in the water, roiling the sand. In the dimness abovewater vague faces, blank eyes loomed and vanished, reappeared. Nets and hands groped, missed, missed again, then caught and lifted him writhing up into the air. He struggled to take back his own shape and could not; his own spell of homecoming bound him. He writhed in the net, gasping in the dry, bright, terrible air, drowning. The agony went on, and he knew nothing beyond it.

After a long time and little by little he became aware that he was in his human form again; some sharp, sour liquid was being forced down his throat. Time lapsed again, and he found himself sprawled face down on the dank floor of the vault. He was back in the power of his enemy. And, though he could breathe again, he was not very far from death.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The chill was all through him now; and the trolls, Voll's servants, must have crushed the fragile trout-body, for when he moved, his ribcage and one forearm stabbed with pain. Broken and without strength, he lay at the bottom of the well of night. There was no power in him to change shape; there was no way out, but one.

Lying there motionless, almost but not quite beyond the reach of pain, Festin thought: Why has he not killed me? Why does he keep me here alive?

Why has he never been seen? With what eyes can he be seen, on what ground does he walk?

He fears me, though I have no strength left.

They say that all the wizards and men of power whom he has defeated, live on sealed in tombs like this, live on year after year trying to get free . . .

But if one chose not to live?

So Festin made his choice. His last thought was, If I am wrong, men will think I was a coward. But he did not linger on this thought. Turning his head a little to the side he closed his eyes, took a last deep breath, and whispered the word of unbinding, which is only spoken once.

THIS was not transformation. He was not changed. His body, the long legs and arms, the clever hands, the eyes that had liked to look on trees and streams, lay unchanged, only still, perfectly still and full of cold. But the walls were gone. The vaults built by magic were gone, and the rooms and towers; and the forest, and the sea, and the sky of evening. They were all gone, and Festin went slowly down the far slope of the hill of being, under new stars.

In life he had had great power; so here he did not forget. Like a candle-flame he moved in the darkness of the wider land. And remembering he called out his enemy's name: "Voll!"

Called, unable to withstand, Voll came towards him, a thick pale shape in the starlight. Festin approached, and the other cowered and screamed as if burnt. Festin followed when he fled, followed him close. A long way they went, over dry lava-flows from the great extinct volcanoes rearing their cones against the unnamed stars, across the spurs of silent hills, through valleys of short black grass, past towns or down their unlit streets between houses through whose windows no face looked. The stars hung in the sky; none set, none rose. There was no change here. No day would come. But they went on, Festin always driving the other before him, till they reached a place where once a river had run, very long ago: a river from the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

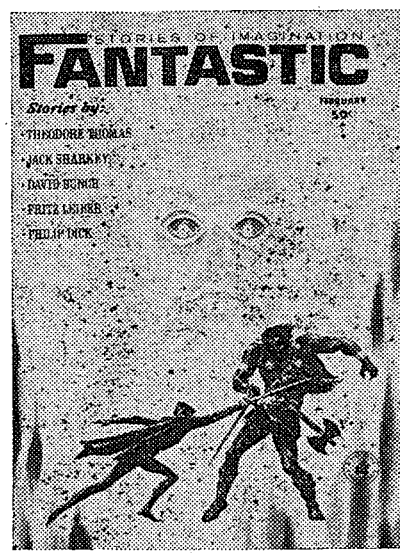
living lands. In the dry streambed, among boulders, a dead body lay: that of an old man, naked, flat eyes staring at the stars that are innocent of death.

"Enter it," Festin said. The Voll-shadow whimpered, but Festin came closer. Voll cowered away, stooped, and entered in the open mouth of his own dead body.

At once the corpse vanished. Unmarked, stainless, the dry boulders gleamed in starlight. Festin stood still a while, then slowly sat down among the great rocks to rest. To rest, not sleep; for he must keep guard here until Voll's body, sent back to its grave, had turned to dust, all evil power gone, scattered by the wind and washed seaward by the rain. He must keep watch over this place where once death had found a way back into the other land. Patient now, infinitely patient, Festin waited among the rocks where no river would ever run again, in the heart of the country which has no seacoast. The stars stood still above him; and as he watched them slowly, very slowly he began to forget the voice of streams and the sound of rain on the leaves of the forests of life. **THE END**

COMING NEXT MONTH

A festival of short stories celebrates the February issue of FANTASTIC. Of course the issue will see the second and final part of **Fritz Leiber's** *Lords of Quarmall,* with another magnificent Emsh cover. But in addition there will be stories about a mysterious woman (by **Ted Thomas**); about a weird inventor (by **Jack Sharkey**); about a world with a lady president who likes vaudeville acts (by **Philip Dick**); and about a man who escapes the ultimate fate because he stopped to pick a flower (by **David Bunch**).



February FANTASTIC, on sale at newsstands January 21.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

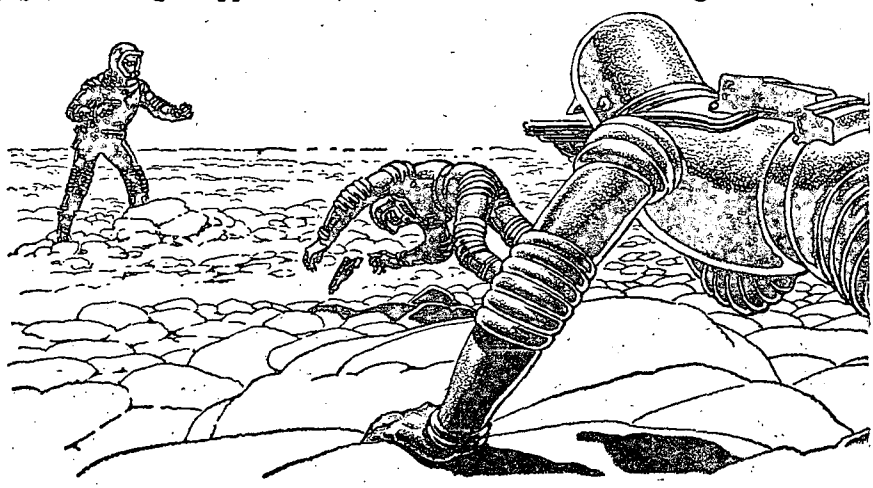
LAST ORDER

By GORDON WALTERS

As it bent with Master to examine some silvery ore stained red by the sullen orb of Jupiter, it saw six figures appear. As they came nearer, they blotted out the view of the planet. They moved with a grace whose deadly menace was exaggerated by the slight gravity. It felt fear for its Master.

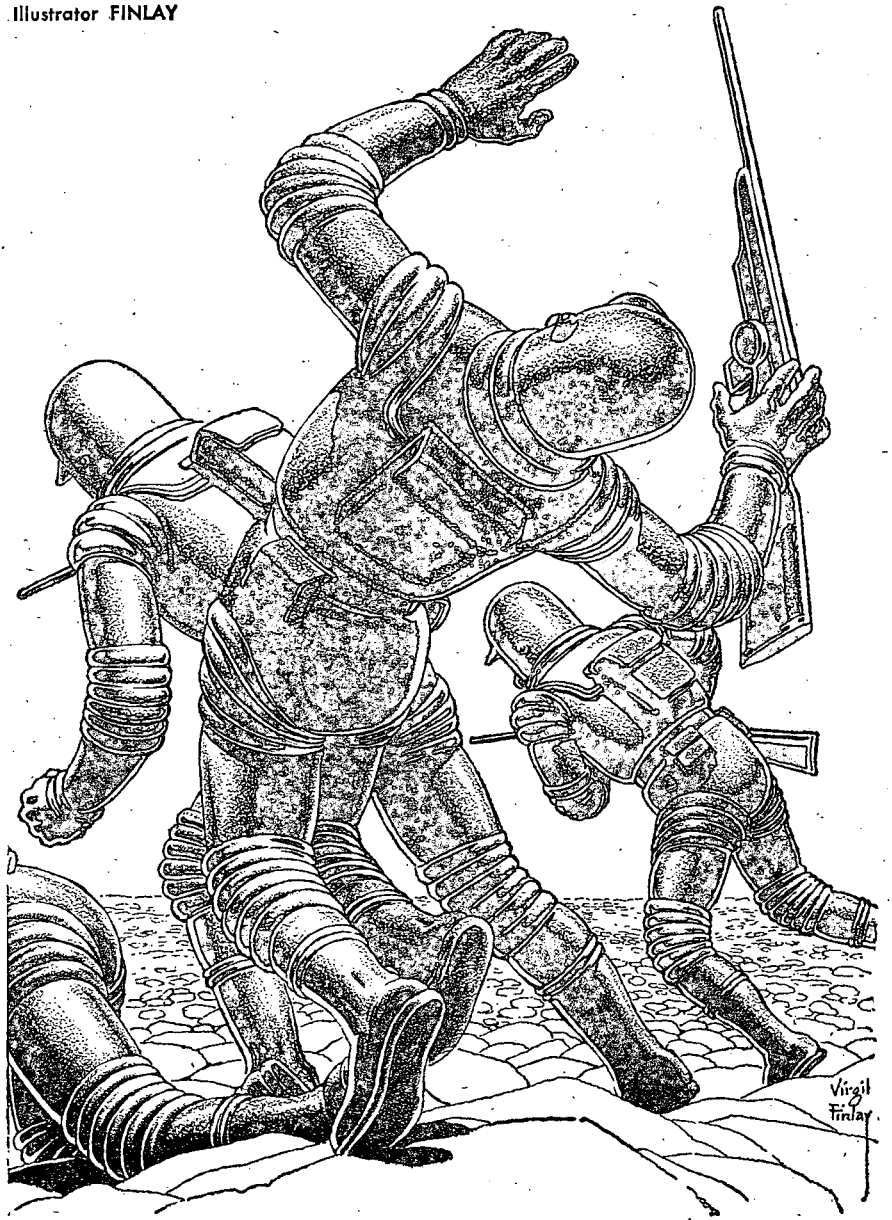
HOURS earlier, the strange ship had come to the asteroid which Master had named Xyreta. The feathery rim of the Field of Power had touched it lightly, making its body tingle. As the stranger approached, the Field became stronger until, at length, its potential gradient was stronger than that of Master's small ship.

It had opened itself to the stronger field. But even as it luxuriated in the surges of en-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Illustrator FINLAY



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ergy, it knew the ship meant danger. It had told Master, but Master had shrugged. It had felt the disdain in his shoulder muscles—disdain made of over-confidence.

But those who hunted Master through the Solar System were as close as space was to Xyreta.

"Beings from the ship," it reported. "They carry guns."

Master looked. Master snapped urgent commands. "Police robots! Run! For our life!"

And for many minutes there was only the chase. At first, they gained. They made fantastic leaps over yawning ravines, some of which went through the asteroid to the other side. They sailed over hundreds of feet of broken outcrops before coming to rest. They landed on loose rocks which threatened to swing away into space, smashing them or, by some freak of dynamics, flicking them into orbit where they would make perfect targets.

As they fled, trying to regain the sanctuary of their ship, hoping against hope that they could get aboard, emotions rippled along Master's skin. Predominate was fear. Fear for his life. Fear for their life. But rising to engulf the fear was a strong feeling of injustice which became a burning desire for revenge. He wanted to turn round half-crouched and snarling with his gun spitting silently. He wanted to kill as many of his murderers as possible before he was himself torn to pieces.

It told Master, in a calm voice, that it would be foolish to turn against such odds. In that direction lay only death. Escape was far better. Escape promised life.

It murmured soft words about meadows and streams and delicate pink blossoms to calm his fears.

But they could not lose their pursuers. The six pursuers—robots which looked exactly like spacesuited men—fired some exploratory shots. Bullets whipped past them, ricocheted into space and became tiny meteors.

MASTER felt the curtain of death running its edge tentatively up and down his spine. But as the Companion labored to destroy the sensation and make Master comfortable again, it felt another emotion rising in him. A new emotion. New after all the years they had been together. Even in the noxious fungus-storms of Saturn, where subtle compounds permeated even its protective influence and made the universe into a place of tactile hallucinations, Master had not experienced that.

Still helping Master keep ahead of his pursuers, it fumbled with the new thing. It was clumsy, and it remembered their early days together . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You are trembling, my faithful," Master murmured.

"Is it because you had to kill many men that you feel this new thing?" It asked, hopefully. Master felt many emotions—guilt, regret, horror—when he recapped that dreadful night in the thick, gravity-laden air of Jupiter's Equator. It had mended his troubled mind, stopped him from walking into a police post and giving himself up, and had kept him moving ahead of the squads out hunting him.

"You *had* to kill those men. They were evil," it said, sharply.

But Master wasn't listening. He ran with the Companion in silence. For a time, they had lost their pursuers.

Then he said: "I am going to die. I am not afraid. But I fear for you. If you live—and you probably will, for they hunt only me and you are difficult to kill—I fear for the consequences. I know you so well."

"You are not going to die yet. While there's life, there's hope. And I will do everything . . .

"We're surrounded! Fire . . ."

But Master would not raise their gun, in spite of its efforts to make him. Then razor-sharp pellets whipped through the Companion and sliced into Master. It felt him shudder under the impact, and felt his air make the keening vibrations of its escape into the vacuum of space.

Desperately, it did what it could. But it was no use. The man was dying, and the little it could do to sustain life was not sufficient.

It felt his lips move. He framed words in the last, pitifully thin vestiges of air it held against his laboring lungs. It listened to the Last Orders, even as more slugs bit into them. And it sobbed with the turmoil the orders brought. How could Master, after what had happened, speak like this? Part of the orders it would fulfill to the letter. But the other part, derivative of Master's new emotion?

It could see no reason for it. The conditions just did not apply.

It thought: "Perhaps Master didn't realize what he meant. Strange Master. I wish I could always understand him." And it cancelled the second part of the order.

Its heart was filled with a desire for vengeance. It would revenge itself on Master's murderers. Master's murderers were police robots. Machines. Last Order *couldn't* have meant what it said. He might as well have extended it to cover spaceships, aircraft and radio apparatus.

It followed them, carrying Master's body, Master's gun held ready to fire when it had a target. At times, it caught glimpses of them moving with a madden-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing orderliness. It fired burst after burst, but always they were too far. It spoke Master's curse-words because they ignored its act of vengeance. They were so like spacesuited men that it expected them to run and duck for cover like men—like Master. But they were only machines, and were as difficult to kill as the Companion.

They boarded both ships, and it spattered its ammunition vainly against the hull of the police vessel. It only released the trigger when they blasted off and its ammunition was vaporized.

It wandered over the asteroid until its life ran out and it lay down with Master in the thin sprinkling of ore under the vault of stars that was the roof of its home. The swollen orb of Jupiter made it look a torn and bleeding thing.

LIFE, incredibly, returned. It was lying face down. It turned over slowly, as the amount of life in its body increased. There was still the vault of the stars, but Jupiter had gone. Presently, its improving vision picked out the small jewel that was Saturn.

Time had passed.

Then it saw the ship. The ship which was coming closer and which was giving it life. It would land soon, it knew. Only one thought was in its mind. The police robots had returned. And it had work to do.

It rose to its feet. Master's body was heavy, but it lightened as its strength returned. As it hefted the gun, it felt that it had awoken briefly once before, but that there had been no time to do anything. But this time it hoped the Power would last long enough to keep it going. As the ship passed over its head, it moved towards the place where it would touch down. It hoped there were many robots aboard the ship.

Its desire for vengeance had matured during the years it had lain lifeless. Much it had forgotten; the few remaining impressions of Master's last hours had been drawn into the Companion's drive for revenge until they were almost invisible. Only the Last Orders were left—a bright beacon which made it want to cry although it had no power to do so, and a dark, strange pit of incomprehensibility which it could only disregard.

The ship reappeared. It was in orbit around Xyreta, performing odd maneuvers. Why? But—more important—had it left any robots behind?

It had. The Companion came quite close before they saw it. Then one, who was examining some rocks, looked up. Others looked up too. One or two rose to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their feet. At first, it was puzzled. It had expected to be ignored, as it had been before. Then it rationalized the riddle:

"Probably, they are different robots. Robots who know nothing of what happened before. They are curious. But no matter. They are the brothers of the murderers."

The whole race of robots was its enemy. For some reason, it thought of itself as a fox with the opportunity to turn on the hounds. It wondered at the significance of the curious comparison. The Companion was a sentient being. But try as it might, it could not see beyond the words of that simple analogy, even as it felt that understanding it was important.

It felt lost; without identity.

No matter. The robots were there. It would not fail Master.

It felt noble.

TO Haggard Pietri, the present was just a place he happened to live in. It kept him alive and gave him a chance to become drunk, pick up some nocturnal company and clear his mind of any congestion it had acquired during the day's work.

He reserved his intellect for the past and for, particularly, its creatures.

The thin man found him at midnight in an old plastics factory. There was very little light; what light there was came from Pietri's torch. Pietri jumped when the thin man's foot stumbled against a hidden object. His heart-beats fused, to become a tremble.

"You are frightened," the thin man said. He spoke in a flat, machined manner reminiscent of the tailored vocal responses of robots. A thin manner that seemed alien when hung onto a human being.

Haggard smiled, as his pulse returned to normal. "Old buildings scare only those who believe in aliens."

"Aliens?" said the thin man.

"Aliens, beings that haunt the Earth—have haunted our world for hundreds of years. Lonely relics of a bygone race which live in places which man has vacated. But I'm not really scared. You see, I am on Earth, I am at home. The beings I wait for are on a world alien to them."

"Go on."

"Strange, insubstantial creatures which rarely reveal themselves to man. They are irresistibly attracted to the places where machinery had once operated. Machinery is not a part of man, really. But it is a part of the way of life of these relics of a once highly technological race." He spoke intensely.

"Have you ever contacted these—ghosts?"

"*Not* ghosts!" Pietri said ve-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hemently. "Although mankind, in his untutored infancy, called them that. No, I have never found one—but when they reveal themselves to me, it will be the biggest breakthrough since man discovered thinking."

The thin man chuckled. Then the sparkle of humanity was washed away, and his voice was thin again. "Your secretary told me you would be here. I have a case for you."

He produced a card authorizing him to practice as a freelance interplanetary agent. The austere letters glowed in the darkness. But he kept his thumb over the name. Pietri felt vaguely frustrated; he was curious to know the name of such a curious person.

"No," he said.

"I am aware that you never handle cases which require extension of your field of inquiry beyond the Earth's atmosphere. I'll be quite level with you—this case has nothing at all to do with Earth. Nevertheless, I am confident that you will travel to Number 74, Orbit 7, to meet the man who will work with you."

"I have worked solo for twenty years. I don't intend to change the habit. And I *never* work on other worlds!"

"There is an excellent fee. Forgive me—'reward' would be a better word. The Praseodymium Mining and Development Corporation are offering a million dollardits for the solution to the trouble on one of their claims."

"A million!"

"I thought you'd be interested."

"I am not. My agency and I are not interested in the misdemeanors of asteriod miners." But there was a certain hesitancy softening the hard refusal.

THE thin man saw this and took advantage of it. Casually tapping some pieces of dust-eroded equipment with his shoes, he said: "You will enjoy working with your partner."

"I am a lone wolf. Now, if you'll excuse me . . ."

"Just a moment. What if your partner is Jackson McCann?"

"Jack McCann!" Pietri shouted the name. "I haven't seen Jack for more than twenty years. He—went into space. The last I heard he was on Pluto. D'you mean . . . ?"

"He is still hunting extraterrestrial criminals."

Pietri heard the thin man's words only as a continuous blur of sound. He was remembering times fresh with the youth of twenty-five years ago. They had been partners, running a small detective agency on a budget largely dependent on what they could hock confiscated automatics for. They had, inevitibly, attracted the rather sleazy, ill-paid

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cases which more respected detectives wouldn't handle. Several of their pryings in private places involved untangling the misfortunes which befell extraterrestrials who were misguided enough to visit Earth.

These affairs had eased a once close partnership apart. Pietri had become sick of dealing with the dozens of little red Martians, and the nauseating things from Venus. On the other hand, McCann had been fascinated by the scope offered by the 'Citizens of the Solar System'. His daydreams no longer consisted of affairs with sultry murderesses, but wandered away from heavily perfumed boudoirs to the heavyly-laden slave-things of Jupiter.

He had eventually scraped up enough money to take a trip to the Moon. And from then on, he couldn't be kept away from space. One day, the partners took a chance and accepted a dangerous case nobody else would touch. More by luck than by judgment, they succeeded. It paid well, and they decided to split up. McCann vanished into space, while Pietri built up a prosperous business in Old Los Angeles.

But as he grew older, he thought more and more about those early days, and often regretted not sticking with McCann.

IT'S strange how you detest Martians and Venusians, yet you are irresistibly attracted by your own mysterious aliens," the thin man interrupted his reverie.

Pietri looked at him sharply. "How did you know?"

"I once—met McCann. He told me about you, which is why I'm here now. He said you would be the ideal man to handle this unique affair."

"You said I would be working with him again?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to, but—"

"Look, Mr. Pietri, I'm not asking you to take on the case and its commitments sight unseen. Neither do I expect you to turn it down in the same way. Will you withhold your refusal until I give you a few details?"

"You're wasting your time. I can't go into space."

"I mentioned the Praseodymium Mining and Development Company a few moments ago. Did I say that their main interests lie in the asteroid belt? The locale of your investigation will be a place called Xyreta, which passes close to the orbit of Jupiter. Its mean diameter is fifteen miles. The only reason it rates a name is that there are large deposits of praseodymium on it. This element is one of the rare earths, and is an essential component of xyromagnetic equip-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment. Until recently, it was almost prohibitively costly to produce in commercial quantities.

"Four months ago, a prospecting party found extensive deposits on Xyreta. It was unnamed then, but they found a board jammed into a crack in a rock on which someone had written that name. But they found no other sign that anybody had been there, and surmised that a prospector who had preceded them had failed to complete a claim. It often happens—prospectors seem almost disappearance-prone.

"The party reported to the sponsoring company which made the appropriate claims, and proceeded to other volumes of the asteroid belt. Apart from that one evidence of a previous visit, they found nothing unusual.

"But a company party arrived three months later, and began to assess the ore. While the technicians performed their analyses on the surface of the asteroid, the crew took the ship into orbit round Xyreta and amused themselves with precision maneuvers. They were so immersed in the art of designing original, manually-controlled orbits that they completed several dozen circuits before somebody noticed that there hadn't been any contact with the miners for several hours.

"They tried to raise them on the radio, but failed.

"They landed at the only place on the asteroid on which a ship could land safely, and made for the spot they had left the technicians.

"They found corpses riddled with bullets. The technicians had been shot down while they were busy digging; not one had escaped.

"The crew was armed. They started a hunt for the murderer, who must still be on the asteroid. There had been no sign of anything leaving Xyreta, in a hurry or otherwise. They left a skeleton crew aboard the ship and sent her back into orbit in case there was an attempt to hijack her.

THE search must have been very difficult. Xyreta was nothing more or less than a volcano which had been broken off when the planet which mothered the asteroids broke up. It was honeycombed. But they didn't have to search far. Bullets began to sleet at them from behind a rock. Although they found cover as soon as they could, three men were killed in the first onslaught.

"But they weren't soldiers. One by one they were picked off, and hardly got a sight of their enemy, let alone a shot. The ship's second officer, though, stayed alive long enough to give us some clues as to what we're up against.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The sniper revealed itself when it had thought it had accounted for the entire party. It came out from a hole in the ground and walked towards the concealed officer. It looked human. Looked like a human clad in a spacesuit, in fact. The officer lined it up in his sights, and fired. He was a good shot; he hit the killer. It staggered under the impact, but did not fall. Incredibly, it survived the dozen bullets which must have torn through its body and survived to fire a return burst at the officer. Its aim was accurate, but he lived long enough to report the last ghastly facts to the ship.

"The ship sent a message to Phobos Station. They sent a police force to Xyreta. They recovered all the bodies, but found no sign of the killer. One fact which may be significant is that it had opened every suit and exposed its occupants to space. No human being, surely, would have done that, whatever his motives for slaughter.

"They decided to wait until the thing reappeared, or until it tried to leave the asteroid in the ship they presumed it had concealed there.

"But nothing happened. At length, they reckoned the thing had either disappeared into space or had died."

"Did they find the spacesuit it was using?"

"No—but that doesn't mean it wasn't there."

"Could it have left Xyreta by natural means?"

"Not without being seen by either the Company ship or the police."

"How long did they stay?"

"About a month."

"Could a man have lived in a suit that long?"

"No. A week at the most. And they were satisfied that there was no spaceship it could have used as a base—or an air-dome, either. Both structures are a lot easier than a suit to detect . . ."

"Then—our villain is either a dead man, or . . ."

"Yes?" The thin man smiled slightly.

"Something outside the present range of human knowledge."

"That is exactly why I am here. One of the Directors of PMDC is a spaleontologist. His special interest is the race of beings who inhabited the 5th planet before it exploded. It was an intelligent race with who knows what strange powers. He thought the killings might have been the result of unknown and incomprehensible forces still lurking on Xyreta."

"Which used a Terran weapon to kill?"

"Remember that early prospector who named the place? He would have carried a gun."

Pietri murmured: "One of my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aliens is inhabiting a miner's spacesuit."

"It's the first time you've had real proof of the truth of your theory. And the first time you'll have had an opportunity for tracking an alien down," said the thin man.

"You're right. I must admit I'm tempted."

"I told you you'd be interested! You leave tonight on the shuttle."

"I'm sorry—but I can't."

"This is the chance of your life!" The lifelessness had been draining from the thin man's voice. Now, he sounded like a genuine, impassioned human being. "You can't afford to miss it!"

"I know. But there are—reasons why I can't. I'm sorry."

"Very well, then." The thin man stood very still. Pietri, by the dim light of his torch, could see the stern outline of the man's features. They remained straight; as unbending as a robot's. Pietri had never met a man who had so impressed him as an incomplete person. A zombie. And the worst of it was that with that last brief flash of life had come a nagging sense of familiarity. He felt he ought to know the fellow . . .

The man moved without a word towards the door.

"Wait!" he shouted.

The thin man turned.

"I'll go. I shouldn't—but—"

"I knew you would. You said yourself it would be a major breakthrough. And McCann will be with you to help you get used to space."

Now that he had made the decision, Pietri was bubbling with enthusiasm. But, oddly enough, the stranger didn't want to stay and share it.

"I'm only a formless go-between. McCann will fill in all the rest of the details when you get to the rendezvous. One thing, though—Jackson McCann has changed in 25 years. I—thought I ought to warn you."

And the thin man drifted away into the darkness. Only the patter of his soles proved that he was not a ghost. As he blended with the night, Pietri heard him call: "Don't forget, Gard. Rendezvous at Number 74, Orbit 7."

II

PIETRI tried to lose his apprehension with the steady twisting of his shuttle ticket between his fingers. To stop him returning to the ticket office, he forced himself to think about some oddities which had begun to puzzle him.

Why had the thin man—dammit, *where* had he seen him before?—contacted him in the old factory in the middle of the night? It was almost as though

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he hadn't wanted Pietri to see him. It must have had something to do with the impression of the man not being a man at all.

And the business about Jack McCann. Why hadn't he come down and talked to Pietri personally? Why the go-between? And what did the thin man mean by Jack being changed? Hell, anybody would change after twenty years in space. Why make a special point of it?

"The flight to Orbit 7," a loudspeaker barked. "Boarding zero minus four."

He caught the shuttle seconds before the airlocks wrapped shut around the ship. The time before the countdown was the worst he had ever experienced. Apprehension nibbled at him first with exploratory incisors. Then fear tore at him with rending canines and mauled his stomach with bruising molars. He was no longer a comfortable soft human being on a comfortable soft world surrounded by comfortable soft people. He was a helpless fragment of flesh in the stainless steel hands of something completely impersonal; something as interested in his fate as the butcher's hook is concerned about the joint hanging from it. The shuttle was nothing more or less than a robot. The flashing lights were its eyes—but behind them was no mind, just a series of cells for storing data. Ready to be taken over—

And he was leaving his home, the comfortable Earth.

Some clicks—the closing of relays—made him start against his straps. Was the alien talking to him?

It said: "Take-off zero minus one."

He struggled, but it was too late to escape. Years later, death came with an intolerable weight pressing him smaller and smaller, until he was an immensely dense atom held in the palm of . . .

RECOVERY was like waking from an alcoholic stupor in the cold grey morning. There was a mixture of euphoria and nausea. He was floating like a giant emulsion on billows of foam which tickled the back of his throat. Slowly, he realized he was in space, falling free towards number 74, Orbit 7.

He fought down an urge to vomit, forced himself to accept his surroundings, forced himself to read the instruments as he had been briefed. Not that there was any need to—the shuttle was completely automatic. But they called it fall therapy, for people who were affected by the first shock of space. People like himself.

As the shuttle moved towards Number 74, he learned to inter-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pret them and get used to free fall.

After a while, he took a tentative peek through the vision port. He steeled himself for his first glimpse of naked space, separated from him not by miles of cushioning atmosphere, but by three thin fractions of an inch of plastimetal.

He was facing away from Earth, so he could see nothing of his home. There were some stars. There were many stars. There were stars of all colors, more sharply defined than the few which could be seen from California.

That was all.

There was nothing else.

And Haggard Pietri looked upon the Milky Way with a complete lack of emotion.

He watched the stars for a few minutes, then chuckled as he thought of how he would describe to Jack McCann his first impression of space. Four words would suffice: "Space left me cold."

A large, skeletal structure floated into one corner of the port. It was like a gigantic scaffolding dumped into space. Lights shone here and there, like workman's lights, but colder and sharper. He wondered if they had bulbs. In space, a filament wouldn't need a thin glass coat. Neither did those bigger lights, the stars. If a man invented a tiny sun on Earth, he would need a bulb to enclose it. Or would he?

He felt touches of gravity which were like the flicks of a feather duster. These swung him slightly from side to side of the cabin, but were not discomforting. He thought that he could almost get to like them. He translated into music. Spacemen on long voyages in gravity-less conditions could play with their steering jets. Traditional rhythms, the ancient jazz . . .

Then there was the vibration, as gentle as the gravity touches, of the ship making contact with Number 74, Orbit 7. There was the grating sensation or air-lock connections being made. The loudspeaker burped once, said:

"Welcome aboard, Gard!"

"Jackson!"

Pietri hauled himself along the air-tube, flung himself through the airlock. His hands were outstretched, ready to embrace his old partner.

Then he saw the monster. His heart ran dry of blood. He gripped a stanchion to prevent himself from crashing into the thing.

"What's the matter, Gard? Trying to knock me through the airlock?"

And the enormous thing of metal and plastics moved towards him. He laughed, feeling ridiculous. McCann was simply

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clad in a spacesuit. But . . .

"Why are you wearing a suit? There's plenty of air here!" Then the questions were forgotten as years of separation took over. He embraced the smooth, faintly warm suit. "It's been so long!" he cried. "The times I wished I'd come out with you."

"The times I wanted to come and see you again! But I never could."

IT was an awkward re-union, full of things that wanted to be said, and which all tried to come at once.

"There is—something about space that keeps me away from Earth. When I *did* touch Earth, it was worse than—than a sentient being of liquid helium could imagine hell."

"You mean—you *have* visited Earth? Why didn't you . . ."

"Call in and see you? But I did." A lithe plastic arm encircled his. It felt almost alive, such was the perfection of its workmanship. "Don't you remember yesterday and that old, dark house?"

"Yesterday?" Pietri peered closely at the face dimly visible inside the helmet. It was many years older than the face he remembered, worn thin and arid by a life of unguessable activity. But it was undeniably McCann's. And somewhere in it was the face of the thin man. The face so mechanical on Earth was full of personality here in Orbit 7. "You never said anything," he said, reprovingly.

There was a long silence. Then came an answer he knew was only half an answer. "I wasn't—in the mood yesterday. I didn't want to spoil our re-union. In the darkness you weren't likely to recognize me—and be disappointed." He laughed, as though shrugging the matter aside. "We blast off for Xyreta tomorrow."

Pietri shook his head sadly. Jackson McCann breaking through the almost new personality of the man in the spacesuit.

"You're right," he said. "You have changed. When I saw you last, you wouldn't have said: "We're blasting off tomorrow". You'd have produced half a litre and shouted: "To hell with tomorrow"."

McCann smiled. "Those were the days. Come on, I'll take you to the cabins I booked for tonight. We can talk there."

"Talk? We haven't seen each other for more than a generation, you want to talk!"

"Well, we could go out for a couple of drinks . . ."

"You're darn tootin'! This is Number 74, Orbit 7. I might have come down in the last shower of meteorites as far as my knowledge of space goes, but even I know what this place has to offer. It carries a bigger red

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

light than the Red Spot of Jupiter. We've got the whole damned journey to your asteroid to talk about the past."

"We haven't. There's a hell of a lot of work that has to be done. You have to learn quite a lot before . . ."

"Sure, sure. But we can still have our re-union over a Tia Maria and Peyote, rather than a cup of tea and a lemon soda."

McCann sighed. "But we better not make it too late. We can't risk missing our departure time."

"Why, have we got an orbit to catch? I'm sorry, Jack. I think I was just expecting too much. After all, it *is* twenty-five years. We're both pushing fifty. And while I'm still looking for sinful lust, I suppose you are respectfully married."

McCann said nothing.

Pietri's eyes narrowed. *"Are* you married?"

"Let's go and get drunk."

FROM the outside, Number 74 had looked like a builder's nightmare. Inside, it resembled a surrealist's bad dreams. Being nothing more than a transition station; it prided itself on catering to the peculiar desires of transients. Dozens of compartments, once storerooms, had been converted into bars, gambling casinos and bedrooms. The passages were gravity-less, but the rooms were supplied with artificial fields of varying strengths.

They went into the first bar the network of corridors offered. It was called "The Spaceman's Friend" and its neon tubing had been bent into the form of an idealistic spacesuit. Pietri smiled. "Very apt," he said, soaking up the atmosphere of space from the sign.

"How apt is apt?"

Pietri thought: I'll figure him out one day. He noticed that the xyromagnetic gravity was less than Earth normal. He presumed it was so on account of the planet-sized stomach the barman was forced to carry about with him.

"Good evening," he said.

"Good evening, sir." He looked at McCann. "Good evening—Spaceman."

Pietri wondered what the specially inflected title meant. There was no reverence there. McCann wasn't a starflung hero, not to this fellow. But other men—clad in gaudy uniforms of the space services—were greeted with a joviality containing the respect withheld from McCann.

What was different about McCann?

"What are you ordering, sir?"

He ordered a couple of the bar's specialties—bourbon matured in zero gravity.

"As strong as that for your friend?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

McCann, with an obvious effort, said: "Yes, please."

And he took measured sips from it at carefully timed intervals.

By the fourth round, Pietri had come to the conclusion that the drinks in "The Spaceman's Friend" were very weak. The 'old boots' covered with mascara polish were still looking like old boots polished with mascara.

"Let's go," he said.

They rose together and left the bar. The drinks had had some effect on Pietri after all, and when he entered the free-fall corridors, he started to croon a sentimental ballad about goldfish swimming along a river.

"I like this place," he declared, at last. "I *like* being a spaceman . . . Hey, why don't they have any bars in free-fall?"

"There is one," said McCann.

"Well, what are we waiting for? Halley's Comet?"

It was called, simply, "The Round Room", and was a perfect sphere. There was no seating, of course, but at intervals round the wall were fixed a number of short bars to hang onto.

The main occupation consisted of chasing a number of small globes of liquid around the room with a straw in the mouth. The regulars, he saw, were the ones who balanced their globe of spirit or beer on the tips of their straws and sucked at intervals. The drunks were those who thrust their straws right through the globes and imbibed large quantities of air from the other side.

A sphere of beer with froth surrounding it was the oddest sight he had seen for many years.

The bar was a window about a yard square.

"What is the house specialty?"

"Jovian Heavyweight. Distilled under seven gravities."

"One for me. And . . ." he whispered, "could you put something stronger in my friend's. His inhibitions are a little hard to shift."

The barman said: "It will need an H-bomb to remove a Spaceman's inhibitions. But I'll try."

The drinks were poured by forcing them out of a bottle with pressurized air. Allowing his globe to rest against his plastic straw, his eyes explored the room, searching for someone with whom to spend the rest of the night. At that moment, two heavily-perfumed women floated in. He called them over.

They came at once.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," they murmured. One started to wind her arms round him, expertly sipping from his drink.

"I'm Haggard," he said. "But only by name."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm Gloria. She's Gladys."

"And this is my friend Jack. He's a spaceman."

They nodded. Gloria said: "Tough luck, Glad. I'll see you later."

And Gladys floated away.

"Hey! Where's she going? Doesn't she like Jack?"

"Jack's a Spaceman," she said, with that now familiar inflection. "He doesn't want a girl."

"Of course he does. Don't you want a girl, Jack?"

McCann nodded, vaguely.

"Gladys," Pietri yelled. "Don't go away. Come join us."

And McCann, with a long, lost smile playing round his lips, said: "Hi, Gladys."

THEY arrived unsteadily before the doors of their two rooms. Pietri disengaged a hand from round Gloria's waist, and turned the lock. "I'll see you in the morning," he grinned.

McCann nodded. He suddenly drew himself away from the tentaculate embrace of Gladys. "I'm sorry. I can't."

"That's what I kept saying yesterday," Pietri snorted. "But I became a spaceman. Go on—be a man."

McCann shook his head.

Gladys shrugged. "I never really expected you'd go through with it. But what the hell is it that makes you Spacemen—you special few—the way you are?"

"I—I can't tell you. I'm sorry. Call it breaking faith . . . Here, take some money for your trouble."

Without saying any more, he went into his apartment.

For a long time, Pietri stared at the blank plastic door.

"He—he went in there as though he had another appointment," he mused.

"They always do," said Gloria. "But what are you worried about *him* for?"

III

THE weird, incomprehensible 'night' was followed by the strangest daybreak Pietri had ever seen. As Number 74 swept round Earth, the first sign of the dawn was a faint hemi-halo extending over a gigantic area of space. It seemed to have two arms. Pietri knew it was caused by the refraction of the sun's rays through the atmosphere; he was for the first time impressed how thin and insubstantial was the coat which protected Earthmen from the raw emptiness that was the Universe before the creation.

He thanked providence for the sturdy walls of Number 74.

"You've changed your opinion," a voice said, in his mind.

"Am I a spaceman, now?"

He wondered; and in the transition between slumber and wak-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing, he speculated on the consequences of some gigantic cosmic wind blowing Earth's air-blanket away, and exposing the poor, trembling body beneath.

Then he laughed, and watched the rainbow of the gathering dawn. It grew brighter and spread wider and wider until it was big enough for a focus to develop and spear his eyes with a single blinding flash of light.

On one elbow, eyes half-closed by the sticky threads of sleep, he faced the sun!

For several hours, Pietri went with that image emblazoned on his mind. The memory of last night had been pushed aside for the time being. The reality of their preparations for the voyage to Xyreta was too strange for the unreal to find a place. But at last, it went away, and Pietri was left with a curious emptiness. Curious, yet familiar. It was the same feeling he experienced when walking to the office in the morning, wondering what his agents had found out about their various assignments.

"All that's left is the spacesuits," he said. "We've loaded everything else."

McCann nodded. He turned a nonchalant hand towards Pietri's. "Hop in and walk it over," he said.

Pietri examined it closely. It stood erect, under, it seemed, its own power, and at first glance satisfied his pre-formed conclusions about what a suit should look like—a glorified diving suit. It was opened at the front, like a fish with its stomach removed. He felt its material. It was soft, pliable, yet fortified by a certain strength. Inside . . .

"Why—it's lined with fur!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"It's not fur, but artificial fibre. Its function has nothing whatever to do with heat exchange. Get undressed. Stand in front of it and ask it to clothe you. A spacesuit, you see, is nothing more than a specialized form of robot. When space travel started, they found that if a man wanted to work in non-terrestrial conditions, he had to wear an incredibly complex spacesuit. The *mass* of suit necessary to maintain comfortable life was so great that any incidental reduction of gravity was no help at all. The simplest way to save the muscles of the man from moving the load was, of course, to transfer that work to the suit making it, incidentally, even more massive.

"Electronic circuits were installed to respond to simple commands, such as 'stop', 'walk', 'raise the right arm a foot to the front' and so on. Finer movements were carried out manually. But as Xyromagnetic electronics became more refined,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they transferred the responsibility for the finer movements to the suit as well. This fur consists of millions of sensitive pressure detectors which respond to the slightest muscular movements, and which translate these actions as orders to be fullfilled by the suit.

"Suppose you want to swing your arm upwards.

"It's upper surface presses on the fibres of that part of the suit. This pressure makes the suit move its arm accordingly. The net result is that a person works exactly as though he had no suit at all."

"I suppose this pressure fibre business only works if the person fits the suit."

"Get in and see what happens."

STRIPPED naked, Pietri made as though to step into the open legs of the suit, then stopped. He waited for his mechanophobia to take his fist and force him away. But he felt quite calm.

He placed his own feet into the suit's.

"What do I do? I've forgotten."

"Say: 'Clothe me'," McCann said.

"Clothe me."

The suit enveloped him. Instinctively, as the close fitting, *alien* fur closed round him, seeking even his pores, he screamed and began a fight for breath. His arms flailed wildly, until he no longer had conscious control of them. The suit had taken over, forcing his body into a hundred unnatural positions.

And he couldn't get himself out.

He stopped struggling, became limp with despair. The suit went limp, too. He began to sob. Tears streamed down his face. Then he became aware that the suit was doing something. He could not be sure what, but he was aware of a strange, moist warmth that spread around him. His tears were swelling and bathing him in fluids that seemed a part of him. And there was something else. It was a kind of rhythm, which seemed to match his body processes perfectly.

He relaxed, and allowed himself to accept utter defeat. He was now a part of something greater than himself, something that protected him. Something whose sole function was to look after its victim . . .

A soft, calm voice intruded. "Just say 'open'."

He said: "Open". Miraculously, he was ejected into the cold world. For a moment, he felt as though his bottom should be smacked until the first cry came from his lips. Then he opened his eyes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The suit was standing a couple of feet away.

McCann was smiling. "It was the best reaction I could have hoped for. Most people accept the spacesuit as just another, smaller version of a spacesuit—or a taxi-cab. Those who react with something more than blind acceptance—they are the very few who learn to *use* their suits."

"It's like—I don't know . . . I don't understand it."

"You will."

He pointed to a portrait of a Japanese on a wall. "That's Kamisayana. He was the first to learn the full potential of the spacesuit. It took him years. It took me even longer—and I'm still learning."

Pietri was breathing heavily. With an effort, he said: "There are two aspects to this. The purely physical and the psychological. I just forgot that I was in a taxi-cab whose controls were new to me, and I panicked. I'm sorry. I'll try and treat it as though it were a machine whose use I have to learn."

McCann, oddly, looked disappointed. "I shouldn't have told you about *using* the suits at this stage. You've so much to learn—so many basic principles. We have twenty days of travelling ahead of us, before we get to Xyreta. Those days will be spent training you in the use of the suit. By the time you get there, you'll be thinking back on that first experience. But meantime, its probably best to forget it. Are you fit to have another crack at it?"

It wasn't so bad the second time. He now knew what to expect, and he was quite calm when it closed round him. He found he had perfect freedom of movement inside. The suit gave way for him, whether he wanted to shrug or wriggle to relieve an itch. He could flex his biceps, expand his chest or clench his fists exactly as McCann had said he would be able to. For a few minutes, he simply went on wriggling like a giant worm, getting the feel of the suit. He soon felt at home in it.

He said, feeling by now that he was an expert: "I think I'll take a short stroll." Before McCann could stop him, he stepped forward . . .

Everything went haywire. Somehow, his right foot ended up at an angle of sixty degrees to the ground, and he landed flat on his back. Immediately, the feeling of being trapped returned. He began to struggle to right himself. The result was a frantic flutter of limbs, punctuated by a laugh which only made things worse.

He took a grip on himself, and said the word: "Stop."

Everything stopped.

"Say: 'Get up'."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He did so. He found himself lifted to his feet, not by the arms or the shoulders but by every portion of his body, including some he would never have dreamed of. Then all was still again.

"See what I mean about practice?" McCann said. "It's best at this stage to confine yourself to verbal orders and very simple movements . . . Ever done any judo?"

"A bit. I learned the basic movements."

"Learning to use the suit is like learning judo. A couple of weeks will give you the principles. It's only if you lived with it for twenty years that you'd achieve perfection of control." He shook his head. "A couple of weeks will teach you all you need know."

Pietri nodded. But his thoughts were far away. Why was McCann making such an issue of the matter? It was as though he was longing to pour a torrent of thoughts on Pietri about the suit and its half-mysterious potential. An idea peeped out at him from darkness:

Suppose McCann's suit was *inhabited?*

He shuddered.

IV

WHEN it came to life, something hinted that it had had a previous incarnation, during which it had achieved a part of its purpose.

And something else told it that it had made an appalling mistake, but it could remember nothing about it. Now that Master was dead, it knew it could assimilate new, Post-Master knowledge with the greatest of difficulty. It was no longer the whole it had been when Master was alive, and the storage of new knowledge was something lost.

But it retained enough to know that . . .

What did it know?

It knew only that it had the Power again, and that there were two robots appearing above the near horizon. It had Master's last order in its mind—but Master's last order, however earnestly it wanted to fullfill it, did not make sense.

It had, instead, ammunition.

THE HOUNDS OF HADES looked after herself for most of the voyage. The first few days were spent in a condition of axial rotation. Pietri had enough problems coping with the suit under normal gravitational conditions without being inflicted with the pecularities of weightlessness at the same time. McCann, watching Pietri's progress, reduced it slowly.

Pietri's attacks of confusion rarely occurred, although the spaceman noted that he always

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hesitated before stepping into the suit. He seemed to examine it carefully, as though looking for something that might have appeared since he u[illegible]d it last.

But he didn't worry about it. The Earthman had an ingrained fear of technology and its products. He'd get over it.

After some days, McCann stopped the ship's rotation and broke the Xyromagnetic circuits.

"No point wasting juice—we aren't going to be blown off course by a gale of wind, and we can correct any minor errors when we get near Xyreta."

Pietri practiced handling himself in free-fall for a few minutes.

"Okay. I think you're ready to go outside now. We'll be doing our work on the surface of an asteroid. Regard THE HOUND OF HADES as an asteroid which has been shaved smooth, and you'll get an idea of the conditions we'll be working under. Negligible gravity. A horizon so close you can wrap your arm round it. Leave your second receiver open at 0.014 microcycles. A ship-load of Space Force Trainees have gone to Xyreta to practice maneuvers. They *might* find something, and call us if they do."

They passed through the airlock, and made sure their safety lines were secured. McCann saw that Pietri clung to the lock handholds tightly.

"Hey, are you all right?"

"Sure. I'm fine." The Earthman's voice was tense.

"Good. Walk slowly round the hull. Remember, a sliding movement is the best method. Anything resembling a step or a jerk is likely to send you shooting into space. Is your line secured?"

The spacesuit nodded. McCann smiled as he saw his friend take his first tentative steps in space. It reminded him of a baby bird trying its new wings for the first time.

Pietri's movements were hesitant at first. But they quickly became smoother and more confident. Then he tried to turn a corner. He made a mess of it, and sailed gracelessly into space. But he wasn't aware that he had left the surface of the ship and, ten feet away from the hull, he tried another step.

McCann chuckled. "Beautifully executed. Like a ballet dancer. But you have now lost contact with the ground. Take hold of the line and pull yourself in towards the ship."

There was a sheepish: "I never noticed," and Pietri returned to THE HOUND OF HADES. He paused for a moment to regain orientation, then started to shuffle towards the nose of the ship.

0.014 micro cycles suddenly blared into life: "Hound of Hades! Hound of Hades! Hound

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Hades! There has been another murder. Two trainees have been killed."

THERE was a crackling of static induced by flurries of solar radiation. When the voice broke through again, it proceeded with a detailed account of what had happened.

"Two trainees were left on the surface to do some field geology. They wandered away from the landing area—and the next we heard was their sharp cries as they were shot down. We landed. And we managed to recover the corpses without further incident.

"We had been sent on three weeks' maneuvers by the Space Office—and officially we knew nothing of what had happened on Xyreta earlier. It was only by chance that we heard about the trouble . . ."

The officer's voice broke off. McCann thought for a second that his transmitter had broken down. But he was wrong. When the man spoke again, his voice was trembling slightly, as though he was making an effort to keep calm.

"I wish I knew," he said, slowly, "whether the Space Office was aware of the facts about Xyreta when it sent us here? Was it coincidence—or did they use us as bait. I suppose you realize that if they can establish that Xyreta is inhabited by a malignant entity, it becomes the Government's charge—and the Government would certainly like to get their hands on the asteroid's praseodymium . . .

"I'm sorry. I'm probably being unnecessarily bitter. But—hell—I'd like to know if there was more than one reason for my two men dying . . .

"Best of luck. You'll need it."

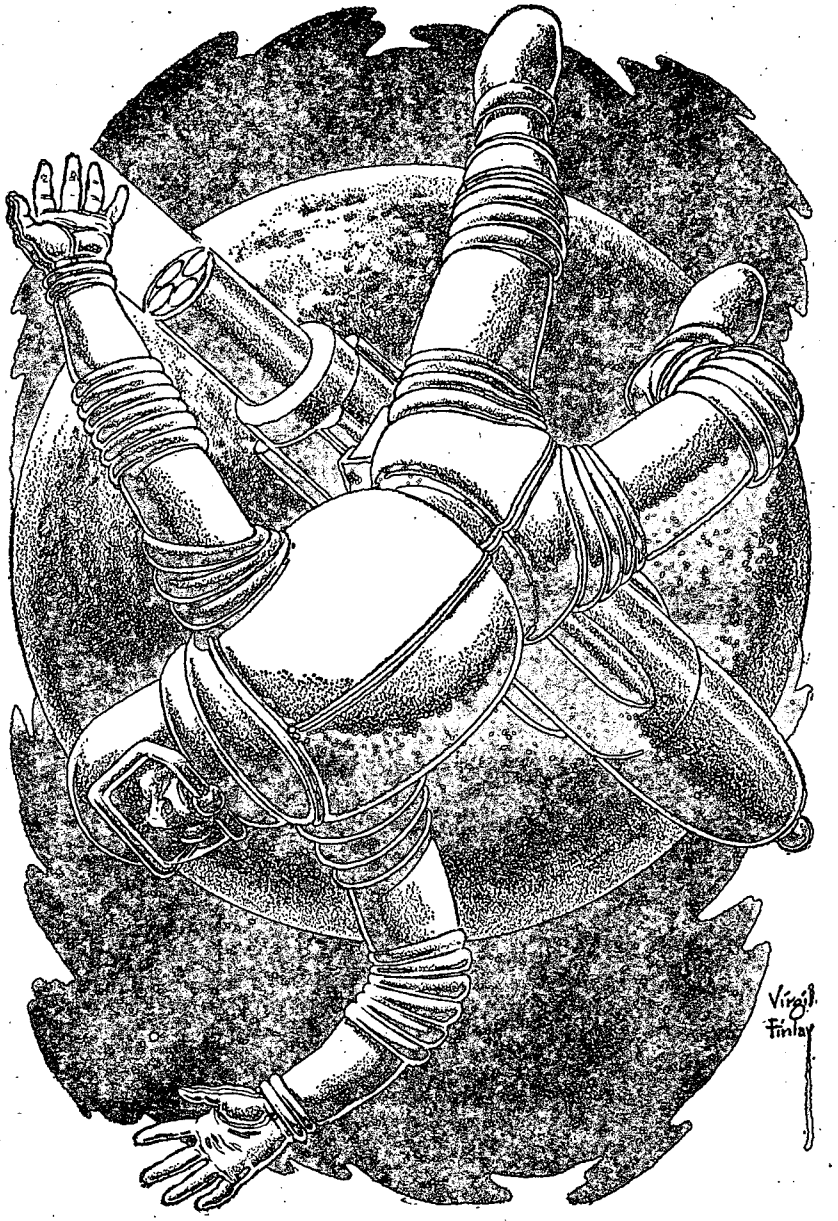
"Thanks," said McCann. It was all he said. It was all he could say, as he thought how glad he was to have Haggard Pietri along with him. If he couldn't find a way of dealing with the alien, nobody could.

He was brought back to the tiny world of THE HOUND OF HADES by the vicious slap of a cord against his suit. He looked about frantically for Pietri. He saw the still writhing end of the man's security cord. It had snapped, as though the man had sprung away from the ship. He must have had his receiver on loud and the frantic tone of the earlier part of the signal had catalyzed Pietri's incipient panic.

He searched the black, spangled sky anxiously, meanwhile trying to raise him on the intercom. At first, he could hear only odd sounds, such as those from a breath chopped into gasps. Then came words; words he could not understand. At last, he managed to distinguish a phrase:

"It's here!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then shallow breathing. Slow sentences formed which fought through terror with a desperate desire to communicate.

"An alien . . . has taken over my suit . . . It is making me do things against my will. It is like the alien on Xyreta. . . . a member of its ancient race . . . It inhabited the fifth world. I am drifting away into space . . ."

Silence.

Unconsciousness?

No. "I don't. . . want to die."

McCann flung himself into the airlock and hauled himself along to the control room. God, if he was too late! . . .

HE smashed the xyromagnetic controls open. For seconds, seconds which were expanded into years by some strange quirk of relativity, nothing happened. Then there came a slow whirring as the electronic circuits became filled with life, one by one. At last, the Brain was at full power, and he returned to the airlock. There was nothing more to do but wait.

Wait, and curse himself for not leaving the damned thing on in the first place.

He sent out a tentative, reassuring message, hoping it would get through to Pietri's tortured mind.

"Old friend, don't fear. There is nothing to be afraid of. There is no alien."

But there was no answer.

"Don't be afraid, even if you do feel lost. The suits were designed for accidents like this. How much do you know about xyromagnetism? You know it is the basis of modern electronic brains? Robots' brains. Suit brains and ship's brains. As its name implies, one of its side-effects is an analogue of magnetism. When two brains are switched on, and are sufficiently near each other, they attract each other. In fact, they do more than that. A brain which moves across a xyromagnetic field also regenerates itself much in the same way as a self-winding watch in Earth's gravitational field. I thought I'd tell you all this in case you are rather slow to return. Even if you are out there for twenty four hours before you return, your suit will be able to replenish its batteries from the ship's field. And, sooner or later, you will return."

He sighed. If you haven't gone too far, he added to himself.

He went into more detail about xyromagnetics, passing information into his transmitter almost mechanically. His thoughts were far from mechanical. He was afraid for Pietri. He didn't know which direction he had gone. He couldn't follow and have a hope of finding him. The intercom wouldn't give him a fix. Not even a direction.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But if Pietri wasn't drawn back within a few minutes, he would have to look. His remarks about the replenishment of the suit's power were little more than simple reassurances. If Pietri was more than a mile from the ship, the potential gradient would be so shallow that the suit would draw enough power for one brief breath after an hour's absorption.

Damn reassurances! Damn Pietri's mental state. He was letting precious minutes slip past. He would fetch a suit rocket immediately.

He made his way to the storeroom, hoping the ancient things would still work. If not, he would have to use his hand-weapons. They projected missiles at a fair velocity. But it would be hellishly slow. Only luck would find Pietri before he ran out of time.

Damn the fellow. If only he'd say something. By the strength of his voice, he'd know if he was returning.

He rummaged among the stores, the searching taking more precious minutes from him. Then he remembered that he'd got rid of the rockets years ago, as he could never get himself into a position to need them. It would have to be the guns. He selected an automatic weapon, plenty of ammunition of the highest muzzle velocity available, and found himself wondering whether single shots or a stream of slugs would give the best results.

So long as he didn't hit THE HOUND OF HADES, it shouldn't matter.

He was just crawling through the airlock when he felt a thud against the side of the ship. It was soft, unresonant, but it was music to his being. He cried out with joy and hurried over the hull to clasp his friend in his arms. Far from being controlled by a wild alien, the suit acted quite normally. It gained its feet and, knowing its occupant was unconscious, entered the airlock.

McCann smiled. If only Haggard was conscious and taking note of how the suit he feared was taking care of him. Even though Pietri was unconscious, it didn't mean that the suit stopped. Preservation of both itself and an unconscious occupant was a trait carefully programmed into its xyromagnetic circuits. In this respect, it had its roots in the medical robots developed during the Fourth War.

He said, to his own suit: "You'd look after me, wouldn't you?"

V

AS soon as McCann had pumped the last cc. of sedative into Pietri's veins, and changed the troubled cataracts of unconsciousness into a gentle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sleep, he flung the ship into maximum acceleration. THE HOUND OF HADES tore its way through space. If she had been sailing the seas of Earth, she would have hurled a bow-wave to create a second Flood.

And as she swept towards the asteroid, with Saturn growing perceptibly larger, McCann knew that urgency had been added to the affair. He had been informed that an Interplanetary Assault Force was being dispatched from Earth to blanket the rock with hard radiation. If they did that, the asteroid would be untouchable for many years. But if he could rid the rock of the menace before they arrived . . .

He—and Pietri—would need every second they could get.

He explored his memories for any hint they could give him of the nature of the being. But there was nothing like it in his experience. It took control of a spacesuit—not in itself so incredible if you can grant the alien certain psychokinetic powers. It appeared to be invulnerable to bullets, and probably didn't need air.

The more he thought about it, the more firmly he had to admit that it *was* invulnerable, like the ghosts of mythology Pietri connected it with.

Another message came from Earth, telling him that the Assault Battalion had left. He groaned. For once, red tape hadn't snarled up their departure. Being robots, they could withstand higher accelerations than he could—and their human commander would have been specially acclimatized to travel with them. They would arrive on Xyreta no more than a day after them.

Twenty four short hours.

He went over the facts for the tenth time without any ideas.

"For the first time in my life," he confessed to his suit, "I'm beaten. I don't have a single clue to the killer's nature."

The suit said: "Yesterday, we were in the middle of a mental chess game. If we change the conditions of the game *so*, and in *this* fashion . . ."

McCann grinned. "It would be a lot more fun." Good old suit. Always knows what to say. "And to stimulate my powers of analysis. You're a good soul."

"Have I got a soul?"

"That would be the ultimate detective problem. Wonder why the thing opened every suit?"

AS McCann feared, Haggard Pietri did not quite get over the accident. Nothing would induce him to enter the suit again. "I'm afraid I'm a passenger from now on," he confessed, sadly. "I'm sorry—and you'll probably never believe it, but I know when thinking rationally, that there is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no alien being inside it. But my subconscious believes it, and when it takes over, the alien becomes as real as you are standing before me. And that subconscious is ready to push itself in front of me at every opportunity."

"Haggard—you're not a passenger. Even though you won't be able to go out onto Xyreta's surface and scratch around like an old hen with me, you will still be the one to solve the mess. I'll find the facts. It'll be up to you to analyze them. You—and that subconscious of yours. It's more valuable than you think."

A violet button glowed like a quick, new flower. McCann grinned, and moved into the manual control seat.

"We're within a few hundred miles of Xyreta. This is where I handle the ship myself."

The lights dimmed momentarily as he turned the automatic controlling system off, then returned to their former brightness. He snapped several buttons. Screens which had previously been dark glowed, not with light but with a star-sprinkled blackness. They served exactly as windows. Far to one side was a sunlit object which was growing slowly.

"Xyreta," said Jackson McCann. He opened a panel, drew a bank of controls towards him. They were few in number, and incredibly simple when compared with the thousands of instruments the electronic brain needed.

"Eyesight replaces nearly all instruments, and judgment the rest," he grinned, and began to move a simple joystick. The ship swung this way and that. Pietri grabbed hold of something and hung on grimly. "Just getting the feel. My piloting arm has gone to sleep with all this inactivity."

The huge rock swung closer, growing rapidly now. They seemed to be heading straight for it. They couldn't avoid crashing.

Then there was a strong but smooth rush of deceleration pressure, a touch of slightly jerky minor corrections, even a suggestion of turbulence, before there came a peace Pietri had not known since they had blasted off from Number 74.

They had landed.

Jackson McCann thought of bullets lancing at them from behind a rock.

Haggard Pietri dared think nothing.

Suppose *he* was as amenable to an alien as a spacesuit?

ACCORDING to the suit," McCann reported, "I've gone about a mile. A few hundred yards more, and I'll be at the place they said it happened. God, I wish you were out here. This

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

planetoid's a spaceman's Paradise. I've never seen anything quite so beautiful as the daystar bathing these incredible old rocks with those two ultimate colors, black and white. And, low on the horizon, gleaming a pale yet steady blue, is the tiny speck of Earth. Go to the viewport—you'll be able to see it yourself."

Pietri was watching it. Unlike the stars, and even Saturn, Earth was soft and friendly, and appeared to be so close he could almost step out onto her warm, sunkissed beaches.

A swearword punctured his reflections. "Damn these rocks. I'm always tripping over them. Ah, here we are." There was a pause. "There's nothing here. No sign of life. Just a few scratches which might have been ricocheting bullets—or meteors." He chuckled. "It hasn't shot at me yet, so it must be somewhere else."

There was a longer silence. Pietri's eyes kept drifting towards the symbol of home in the viewport. It was higher, now; the asteroid was rotating. He took them away from Earth, and focused on the ground outside. There was no sign of McCann; he was somewhere the other side of an ugly ridge, treading in the footsteps of murdered men . . .

"Still nothing. You know, I keep wondering why it opened those first suits. Was it curiosity? Or was it something else?"

Pietri said something of no importance, while his mind thought of McCann's idol Kamisayana. It took McCann and the Japanese many, many years to really *learn* to use a suit. Suppose it wasn't 'learning' but the slow, inexorable taking over of the suit and its occupant by an alien, to result in a triple symbiosis? That would account, like nothing else, for McCann's strange behavior at Number 74. And now McCann was looking for another of his kind. A second member of the new race of space. Man, robot, alien . . .

He laughed, shortly. "Your imagination is getting the better of you," he said. "You're talking yourself into all sorts of weird theories."

"There's another ridge in front of me. I'm going to climb over it. If they were right, the scene of the big slaughter should be on the other side."

The radio echoed the emptiness of space of a few seconds then stuttered into life, on another wavelength. A call signal.

PIETRI sighed. The military vessel again. It would be the tenth time it had called. He adjusted the receiver.

"Due to arrive in 9 hours. Any success yet?"

"No," he replied, curtly, and slammed that circuit shut. A mo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment later, McCann spoke again. He sounded excited.

"Hullo! I've found something!"

"What is it?"

"A spacesuit. An *extra* one. The murdered folk were all accounted for. This must be the—."

The one which did the killing, Pietri thought.

"It's an old suit," McCann went on. "Hellishly old. But, there's something familiar about it."

"Yes?"

"I—don't know what it is. I've just got the feeling that I've seen it somewhere before. As I said, it's very old. And—its occupant is still inside. It, too, has been shot, several times. I can see the man's face quite clearly. It's still as fresh as though it only died yesterday—and it, too, is familiar. I feel it ought to be as well known to me as my mother's face.

"The suit is holding a gun in its hand. The man died—but he didn't take the killing lying down. He fought. I wonder if he hit the thing that killed him.

"I'm examining it closer to see if I can identify him. Damnit, why should he be so familiar?

"Apart from a few punctures, the suit appears intact. That means it *could* have continued to fight, and it probably did, if its Master failed to give the Last Order."

"What's the Last Order?"

"To tell it to lie down and die. An uncontrolled robot whose last previous order was to fire its gun at a certain target would be a menace so long as it had that target in view. And, other targets like it. But if, for instance, a criminal had been cornered by, say, the police, he wouldn't give the Last Order. If he gave any order at all, it would be for the suit to carry on the good work—

"*Now* I know who it is! It's Kamisayana! Round the left wrist of the suit is a self-winding watch. We don't normally carry watches. The suit is our clock; it records time automatically. But Kamisayana for some reason never stopped wearing his watch.

"So *this* is where he ended! He had been involved in some sort of trouble. He had rid the Solar System of some criminals, but became a hunted man himself. He disappeared into the asteroids, one jump ahead of the robot police forces of half a dozen worlds. He must have sought refuge here . . . NO! It must have been Kamisayana who discovered the praseodymium deposits and named the place, only to be shot down by the thing . . ."

Pietri said: "Perhaps the robot police had caught Kamisayana and killed him. We don't know an alien did it."

"There would have been police records of his death."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not if he'd been such a noble fellow as you made him out. The police would have simply let him disappear."

"You may be right. It doesn't matter. The point is, Kamisayana has been dead for fifty years—and so has his suit. It would have run out of power within twenty hours. And, *had* the suit still been alive, it would not have had the order to fire as its Last Order. Kamisayana would never have left revenge behind him, whatever the circumstances."

"But an alien could have taken Kamisayana's suit over. You found it in an exposed place. Why wasn't it found earlier, and reported?"

THERE was a pause. Then, instead of McCann's voice, came a quick, rhythmic series of vibrations. It was like a—a—

It was terribly, terribly familiar.

Then McCann said: "This is Kamisayana's watch ticking. Haggard, you're the expert on antiquities. How long does a self-winding watch last if it doesn't have the opportunity to rewind? Fifty years?"

"As long as an ordinary watch. A couple of days at the most."

"There's no possibility of it lasting half a century?" McCann sounded desperate.

"Not unless it was operated by atomic power."

"This one has an ordinary watch spring."

Haggard Pietri said, relentlessly: "Then there is no other explanation. Either Kamisayana's suit has retained its power for fifty years . . ."

"Impossible!"

"Or an alien *has* taken it over."

"Still impossible! Alien or no alien, the suit's batteries would still run down. After that, it could not move, let alone mow down a group of human beings. And I can't conceive of an alien which could replenish its power."

"It did! The suit has moved—and recently. The watch proves that. It could only rewind if the suit got up on its hind legs and started walking about. Walking—and firing upon the two space force trainees. Look, Jack, suppose our alien possessed telekinetic powers. The old Terran ghosts were supposed to."

"Yeah, you might have something there. Let's reconstruct. Something resembling a space-suit committed the murders. The labs said that the bullets they extracted from the corpses came from a weapon at least fifty years old. The one in the suit's hand would, as far as I can tell, fit the bill perfectly. I must agree with you that it seems highly probable that this suit and its gun are the causes of death. Now, let's go back fifty years. Let's assume

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your alien has been sitting on this asteroid for hundreds of centuries, helpless in its normal, ghostly, insubstantial form. Or perhaps it does have substance. The important thing is that it is helpless. It needs something to assist it. Something it can use as arms and legs.

"Kamisayana comes along. He is shot down by his pursuers, who presumably left him where he fell. The alien comes out of hiding. It finds the suit. It finds the suit ideal for its purposes. It now has a body. And it is able, in some manner, to preserve the energy in the suit's batteries until man comes again. Then, when men are on the asteriod, it reactivates the suit. Following motives we haven't learned yet, it kills, then goes back to sleep until the next lot of victims come along."

"I don't like the idea of it *holding* that energy in those batteries. If the normal process of xyromagnetic storage includes a natural law of dissipation, I'm not convinced that an alien which is so damned helpless it needs a suit to help it, could prevent loss of power."

"That's more likely than its telekinesis. If it possessed such a faculty, it wouldn't have even stayed on Xyreta. And it would not have bothered with the suit at all."

"We're getting nowhere," Pietri said, sharply. "We're chasing the problem round and round, and all we're catching is its tail. Besides," he added, as a further thought caught him, "Retention of power would only be a special form of telekinesis. I think we can forget anything about that. I think it just takes over the suit's mind. The suit's power comes from another source."

"What blasted source, then? Sunshine?" McCann said, sarcastically.

"It's one hell of a muddle," Pietri said. "I thought it would be an open and shut case once we found the killer. But now we have, everything's so damned contradictory. There's one more contradiction we haven't considered yet."

And Haggard Pietri shuddered.

"What is that?"

"Up til now, the alien or spacesuit or whatever it is has shot its victims down on sight. Why on Earth is it lying there letting you examine it?"

McCann said, softly, "Lord knows."

PIETRI thought, then: "McCann's lying. It's the only explanation. McCann's another like Kamisayana—a man who has had an alien take over his suit and himself. Even now, they're plotting something between them. And McCann is just trying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to lull my suspicions with all this detective stuff. Hullo, here he comes again."

McCann said: "I believe there's a lot more to this than simply an alien taking over a spacesuit. There are some more fragments to fit into the jigsaw —and I'm going to search this lousy hunk of rock until I find them."

Pietri said: "Remember that night on Number 74? What happened after you left the girls and I?"

"Why did you have to bring all that up at a time like this?"

Jackson McCann searched Xyreta methodically. Pietri, although now determined that he wasn't going to let McCann into THE HOUND OF HADES again, was still in contact with him. He said:

"You haven't much time before the radiation patrol comes. I've had more messages. They're going to send a party onto the surface itself to make sure that every last hole is irradiated. They'll be here in about three hours."

McCann sounded tired. "Give me until half an hour before they arrive. Meanwhile—I'm still looking."

One hour passed, without result. A second flew past the same way.

"Well, I better start getting back. I think I'll pay just one visit to our old friend before we go. Mourning him will put me in just the right frame of mind for mourning our million dollardits."

Half an hour later, he announced: "I'm back at Kamisayana. The suit is still lying here. And—it's watch has stopped. I figure I've still got half an hour. Right? The army hasn't arrived early, has it?"

"It's likely to enter orbit any minute now. I thought I saw its rockets blazing a few minutes ago. Yes, I was right! There it is!"

"I'm coming back, now. See you in a few minutes. I can see the ship's motors myself, now. Rather clumsy sort of orbit approach it's making . . .

"God!

"*God,* Haggard! *The suit!* It's getting to its feet. It's standing up!"

"Describe the alien," said Pietri, coldly.

"I can't see. It looks just like an ordinary suit. But I suppose it's in there somewhere, invisible. I must try and kill it. Aim for the head of the suit, where the brain is. It won't be able to control a mindless machine . . . *DAMN* this gun!"

But it wasn't the word 'Damn' that Pietri heard, but a scream.

"It's JAMMED. I can't fire it!"

And Jackson McCann gibbered: "I must run. Find cover. It's raising its gun. Aiming it at me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

raising its gun. Aiming it at me. time . . . the *pain* . . ."

And then there was silence.

A moment later—but it might have been an eon—more words came. But this time they were not for Pietri. They were for its suit.

"Listen . . . listen to the Last Order . . ."

By stretching his aural senses to their limit, he thought he heard a whispered command.

Haggard Pietri looked through the viewport for the spot of blue light that was Earth. It was no longer there, and he felt alone. Awfully alone.

VI

FOR a long time, he stared fixedly at the point in space where the Earth had been.

Then the radio from the robot vessel burped. Haggard Pietri shook his head slowly, looked away from the view-port, and back again. Earth and her moon were once more in position. He must have been trying to see them through the eye's blind spot. He switched the set to transmission.

"My partner Jackson McCann has just been killed. There is an alien intelligence guiding the suit of a man who died here many years ago. This alien is motivated by an urge to kill, and nothing else. How long will it take you to irradiate Xyreta?"

"Perhaps an hour to organize the machinery."

"An hour! But . . ." His voice trailed away. But what? There was no particular urgency. It would continue hunting, until it found more victims or lay down again.

Feeling guilty at having suspected McCann, he felt he ought to go out there and retrieve his body. It ought, at least, to have a decent burial on Earth. But it would be suicide to go out. And more than suicide to get into his suit . . .

"Oh God," he moaned, softly. "I'm so confused. Is there an alien in my suit? Was there one controlling Jack without his knowing it? Are there now two suits out there prowling, both now happily rid of their human encumbrances, or is Jack's at this moment lying inert, obeying Jack's Last Order? Oh, God, I wish I'd never gone into space. I wish I was back on Earth . . ."

He spoke into the transmitter.

"An hour will be plenty of time. I'll be to hell and gone by the time you're ready."

That's it, he thought. Enough self-analysis. Act tough. Play the hard man. And grin. Laugh at something. Remember those historical romances of the US Marines and the US Cavalry. They always came to the rescue at the last minute. Remember the hard, thin-lipped dialogue which went

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with them. The Commander of the Assault Robots is as thin lipped as the best of them.

And why the hell hadn't they been sent in the first place? Then McCann wouldn't have had to die.

Bitterness.

Bitterness against the government who only acted to avenge their own boys, whilst quite happy to let private citizens die like flies.

Then, abruptly, the bitterness was gone, and there was a kind of relief. Relief that McCann's alien had been revealed outside THE HOUND OF HADES, where it could not get at Pietri.

Then the relief was washed away, and he found himself watching the blue star that was Earth again. From the dark curtains of confusion, a white light of half-formed inspiration told him that there might be another answer, one that would fit all the facts, if only he could find the place it rested. The place he could grasp it.

A light flashed on his dashboard. It was a signal. Somebody was outside THE HOUND OF HADES, wanting to come in.

The alien! The suit! Both, perhaps.

HE knew the ship was secure, but, with his heart trembling, he made sure. There was no way in.

He sighed. And laughed. "Try and get in!"

Then McCann's suit radio came to life. And Jackson McCann spoke with McCann's tones and McCann's own way of phrasing words:

"Let me in, Gard!"

The take-off controls were glowing, alive. All Pietri had to do was punch them. But he hesitated, his finger an inch above the big red button in the middle which would send him to his friendly blue speck.

He gritted his teeth. He knew he was clinging to the infinitesimal hope that Jackson McCann had, incredibly, survived the alien's bullets.

Arguing against all logic. Logic told him that it was the alien. It had realized, somehow, its danger, and was trying to talk its way on board THE HOUND OF HADES. No doubt, Kamisayana was standing by its side.

"You can't fool me. Jackson McCann is dead."

"Perfectly correct." The voice was calm, smooth, assured. There was nothing to suggest an alien masquerading as an Earthman. But then, it had twenty years to practice. "This is the suit speaking."

"Nonsense! The last thing Jackson McCann did before he died was to order it to stop. His last order."

"His Last Order was this:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'Please join Haggard Pietri, my old friend, and do for him as you did for me'. I have come to fulfill the order."

"Oh, God, I wish I could believe it."

He found himself remembering a part of a conversation he'd had with McCann. They had been talking about the suits. McCann had been describing the occasions that life with the suit became like life with another human being . . .

"Symbiosis, yes. Perfection, no. Everyday, I come that little bit closer, but it will never be perfect. Most Occidentals are incapable of approaching the symbiotic relationships with their suits that the Oriental races can achieve. It takes a certain kind of mind—the mind that can spend a lifetime telling its body to learn a single judo throw. I am proud to have gone some of the way towards the state of togetherness which Kamisayana reached . . .

"My suit is perhaps a faithful dog whereas his was another human being—complete, no doubt, with orange blossoms."

A man that would be incomplete without his partner. A partner that had become a replacement for other humans.

Yes, it was all possible—and it fitted the facts as well as the other theory, the dark theory of the incredibly ancient fifth world. It was *so* possible that McCann's suit, uninjured by the bullets which had killed its occupant, retained some of the personality of its partner. His memory—and his identity. Its sole motivation lay in what it had become during its life with its occupant.

It could be almost a human being in its own right.

The clouds in his mind parted. In place of the murky crypts wherein dwelt the ghosts of long-dead, inimical aliens, was a splendid clarity.

"Come in, come in," he called, and operated the lock mechanism.

THE suit was open, empty. It said: "I left my Master where we had fallen. I know he would have preferred to be laid to rest in the emptiness of space—which was his home."

Pietri felt a straining at the corners of his eyes. He realized that he was building stiff tears, and tried to squeeze them back into his eyes.

"We're going home," he said. "To Earth. Have you ever seen Earth?"

But the suit said: "Jackson McCann's case is not finished yet. What is to happen with Kamisayana's suit?"

He sighed. It was still out there. It was still a killer. And now, it seemed probable that it wasn't inhabited by an alien aft-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er all. And what had made the robot, whose prime directive was never to harm human life, kill?

He shrugged. Perhaps that last part of the puzzle would never be solved, along with the mystery of where it got its power from. But that didn't change what he had to do. He would have to go out there and shoot it through the head. For radiation was harmless to electronic circuits.

And he had to move fast. Time was rushing past and the irradiation patrols would be landing at any time.

He contacted the ship. "Further developments," he said, shortly. "You must cancel the irradiation order. It's all a mistake. There are no aliens Xyreta."

"Then what the hell is making that spacesuit murder innocent citizens?"

Pietri explained as best he could.

"Yes, it sounds quite plausible. I'm able to accept a homicidal robot. Revenge in a robot is quite a lump to swallow—but we'll just have to. But you haven't explained how, after many years during which its batteries would have run flat, the suit is still able to make like a homicidal maniac."

The dark clouds tumbled round Pietri again. The Commander was right. And it all pivoted round that basic problem.

"I am going outside to find out," he said. "I am taking McCann's suit, take a gun in my hand, and I will shoot it through the head. Then we'll pick it up and find out what made it tick."

"If it wasn't an alien."

"It is not an alien."

There is no assertion as strong as that of a man who once believed the opposite. He added: "There is a perfectly simple scientific explanation for its behavior, I am sure of that."

"What is it?"

He took a deep breath. "You are a spaceman. You have lived your life in space. I am a newcomer. Who is more likely to figure it out?"

HE hadn't forgotten how to use a spacesuit. It was rough going at first, but when he got into the swing of it, found he was able to make quite rapid progress over the asteroid's surface. All the while, he kept a careful lookout for Kamisayana, as he liked to think of the murderer. During the search, the suit had been silent, concentrating on easing him through his own clumsiness.

When he estimated that they were nearing the place where McCann had died, he remembered something.

He said: "You have been working outside for nearly twenty-four hours. Suppose you run out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of power before we finish?"

"We won't. I am fully charged."

"But—how did you do it? Did you plug yourself in when you came in through the airlock? Hell, I'm sorry I didn't think of it before, but I know so little about you."

The voice in his ear sounded as though it were preceded by a human chuckle. "You'll learn all about me soon enough. My brain requires power. The most useful source of power is a xyromagnetic field, which is produced by a xyromagnetic brain in operation. I produce a small one myself."

"I've got it!" he shouted. "I was blind! The clues were in front of my eyes all the time. As soon as a ship comes within range of this planetoid, it covers it with the field generated from its brain. The suit, lying completely uncharged, picks up the energy it requires from the potential gradient produced by the ship moving either towards or away from it. It comes to life—like a hibernating animal awakened by the warmth of the sun.

"Dammit, why didn't I think of it before?"

"It was *our* fault. My Master and I were more used to interplanetary conditions than you—we should have reasoned it out." It intoned the words with a curious, indefinable rhythm. Pietri felt soothed, felt the guilt of his stupidity washed away. It was—strange. It wasn't the words, but the *way* the suit had spoken.

He felt a lot better.

Then he remembered that its function, basically, was to tend to the well-being of its occupant under any conditions. It was simply performing its function—as it had always performed the function for McCann.

He felt the faintly tingly fur touching every part of his skin. Sensory contacts—but more than that. He felt a full being.

He was seized. From behind From the side. From below. From above. He was flung to one side, to fall behind a rock.

For a second, panic hit him between the eyes. For a distrustful second, his old fears came back. Then they were gone, and the suit was crooning:

"I had to do it. I have just seen the Kamisayana suit. It would have seen us."

Now Pietri saw it. It was on the horizon, and seemed to be kneeling. Its gun was held loosely in its hand. Close by was a small cairn of stones.

"Is that where you left McCann?" Pietri asked.

"It was. The exact spot where he died. But I did not build the cairn."

"Then—who did?"

"It must have been the suit. It must have a soul."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pietri felt himself lifted into a standing, then a walking position.

"Hey—it'll see us."

His suit said nothing; Pietri had to follow in its footsteps, literally. After a few paces, the suit saw them. It rose to its feet, the gun still in its hand. It looked in their direction.

It raised the gun.

IT felt sick with the mistakes it had made. But how could it have known otherwise? There was no visible difference between robots and humans clad in spacesuits. It had assumed everytime that the figures it had seen were robots.

It had been confused by the memory of the death scene of its Master. It had thought the first, large number, had been more police robots which had to be killed. It had examined them. It had learned then that it had killed men—and had forgotten when the ship left and it had died again. When it was revived the second time, it had forgotten the first. It had thought there were robots upon which to be revenged. It had shot them both—and had died again soon after.

The third time, it had awakened with a robot standing over it. It had run when it rose to its feet. In exultation, it got its revenge upon that robot, then had watched while the robot—a spacesuit—had laid its Master gently down to rest. Its memories had returned to it at that moment.

It had done something evil to humanity. Moreover, it had gone, however inadvertently, against its Master's Last Order. It had thought it had known better than Master.

It analyzed itself coldly. Master was all-wise. Master had thought in areas into which it could not go. He had known that it was not a fully sentient being. He had known it would forget certain things, confuse certain things. He had known that there was no visible difference between robots and space-clad men. It was a fox—an unreasoning creature who could not distinguish between hounds that hunted and other hounds that were really more foxes.

And Master had covered that in his Last Order:

"Forgive them all—men and robots."

It sobbed. It was nothing more than a robot—and a lot less than that. It was a robot who did not obey.

But now it understood the Last Order.

It raised the gun in its right hand. It aimed it carefully.

And it cried for a brief second with the pain that suddenly constituted its whole being.

THE END

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thrift, Jethro my boy, thrift! Not only do we save money on silver bullets—we can save an extra $3.01 by using the Discount Coupon below!"

Save $3.01 on

STORIES OF IMAGINATION

FANTASTIC

12 eerie issues only $2.99

(newsstand value, $6! reg. subscription rate, $4)

FANTASTIC means Fantasy at its provocative best! Feel the hair rise on the nape of your neck as incredibly ancient horrors slither from their age-old crypts! Futilely ward off exploratory tendrils from the alien intellect that will contact, occupy—and finally conquer—the inmost secrets of your mind and soul!

Prostrate yourself in awe as the Old Gods return to chastise a wayward, erring Earth. Flee through thick-boled forests that time forgot—but never quite fast enough to lose the demons, witches and warlocks that loom up before you in the foul miasma of your own imagination!

Stimulating, Eerie, Sophisticated, Satirical, even Tragic—FANTASTIC will fire your intellect and grip your emotions from cover to cover! It is the Magazine of the Masters—FRITZ LEIBER, ROBERT ARTHUR, JACK SHARKEY, RAY BRADBURY, J. G. BALLARD, ROBERT F. YOUNG! Plus vintage classics from the pens of H. P. LOVECRAFT, ROBERT E. HOWARD, and many more!

FANTASTIC is your magazine. Subscribe now! You save $3.01 on the newsstand price—and get each issue **days earlier!**

☐ **YES**, send me 12 months of FANTASTIC, and bill me later for only $2.99 (newsstand value, $6.00).

☐ Or, my payment of $2.99 enclosed now.

Name_____

Address_____ 1-1001

City_____ Zone_____ State_____

(Add 50¢ per year additional postage for Canada and Pan American countries; add $1 per year extra for all other foreign orders.)

EXTRA SAVING!
24 issues only $5.75

☐ Bill me later

☐ My payment enclosed now

MAIL TO: FANTASTIC/434 So. Wabash Ave./Chicago 5, Illinois

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Non-Fact

A Thesis On Social Forms and Social Controls in the U.S.A.

By THOMAS M. DISCH

Lots of people talk about what kind of country the U.S. will become; author Tom Disch spells it out, however, in this provocative, infuriating, and horribly-close-to-the-mark analysis.

Memo To Thomas M. Disch

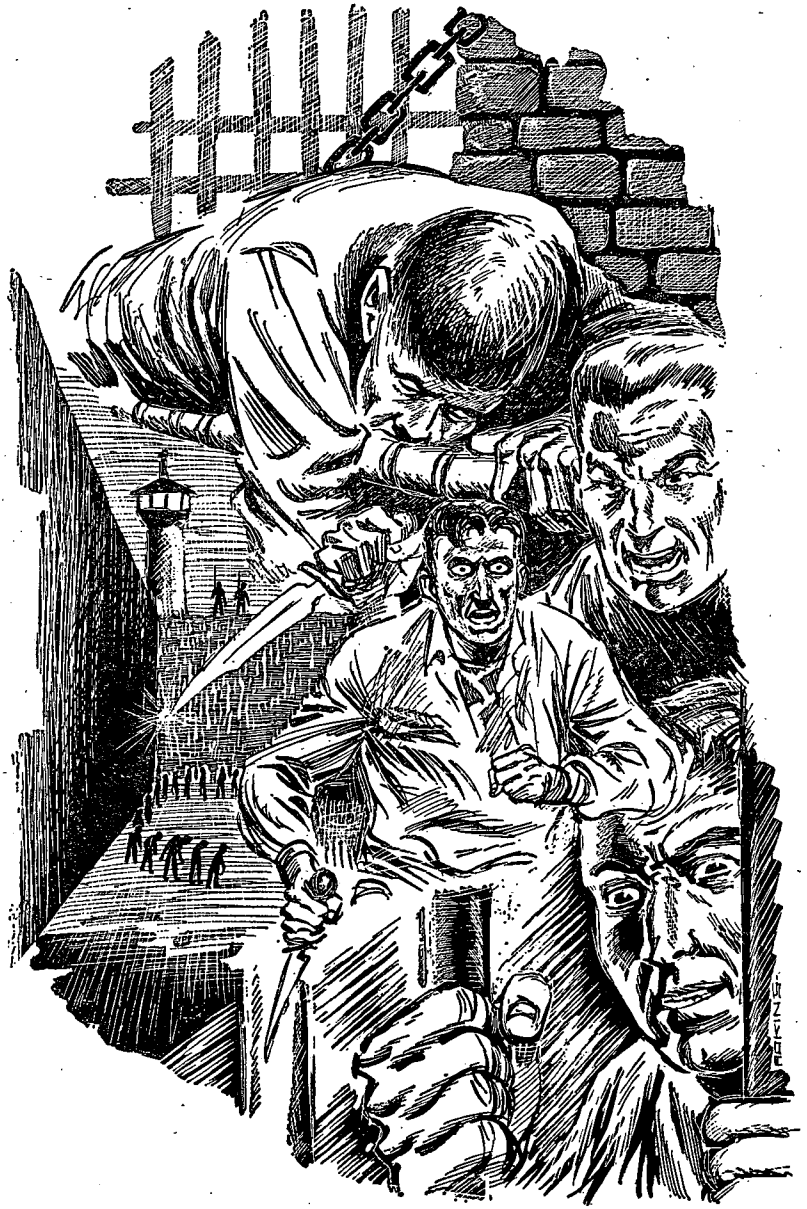
This paper was submitted to me by a third-year Administrative Trainee, Jeremy Friehoff. All students in Sociology S12 (Atopics) are required to submit their own analyses of American Culture. I am forwarding Friehoff's paper for your consideration. Not that the paper represents an original contribution, but I thought it possible that Mr. Friehoff might be of some assistance to you in your present work. I say no more.

M. Jackson Matrix
Administrative Training Center
New York City

SCHIZOPHRENIA is the predominant characteristic of 21st Century man, both socially and individually. It may be objected that schizophrenia is the basis of civilization as such, but only today has the principle of dissociation been consciously adapted to all social forms. The stability of modern society is the pragmatic sanction of its system of split-level living. A satirist of the 20th Century (George Orwell) proposed a dystopic society which had this three-fold motto: "WAR IS PEACE. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY." If, in retrospect, such maxims of "double-think" seem prophetic in an auspicious rather than a foreboding sense, it is a sign that man has profoundly altered his way of thinking.

If the lion has, at long last, lain down with the lamb, it is because in every sphere of action modern man has applied the law of opposites. Equal and opposite

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Illustrator ADKINS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forces produce an equilibrium; conjunction breeds content. To the unwittingly wise adages of Orwell one need only add "LIFE IS DEATH" and its corollary "LOVE IS HATE" to summarize the operative values of modern society. Indeed, they serve this purpose so well, that I have found it convenient to organize my paper on this very basis.

Freedom Is Slavery

QUINQUENNIAL bondage (slavery every fifth year for all adult males between the ages of 21 and 51) is the fundamental institution of atopic economy. Slavery in one form or another is typical of all large-scale economic activities. The pyramids are a monument to the power of the slave teams that built them; wage-slavery laid the foundations of the industrial advances of the 19th and 20th centuries. The slavery of earliest times was relatively stable. Revolts were uncommon. But its eventual supercedence by capitalist forms of slavery was inevitable, for all men were not equally slaves. Under capitalism, the idea of slavery was denied, while the practice of it was extended to every level of society.

"All men are (created) equal" (i.e., equally free) was a favorite platitude of the capitalist centuries. The corollary of this—that all men are equally slaves—was recognized only after the complete upheaval of society in 1974. The scope of this essay does not allow an account of the Restoration period or of the eventual success of the philosophy of Jeremy Lincoln, the founder of quinquennial bondage and many more of today's social usages.* Suffice it to say that without the genius of Jeremy Lincoln the world we know today would be a drastically different and, I am sure, a worse place.

At the age of 21, all men are called to their first year of servitude. Until this time their education has been humanistically oriented, their artistic and rational faculties cultivated, and the development of their erotic capacities encouraged. Ideally, they are totally unprepared for the demeaning circumstances that await them in a labor camp, for slavery is never discussed in polite society. In the preparatory schools all references to this subject are systematically suppressed, the student body itself being the most efficient agent of suppression. Those who are unequal to the strain are reserved for positions in the Administration, but such cases are relatively few and will be discussed later.

The shock on first arriving at a labor camp is of the highest importance in the development

*An excellent history for this period is Marvin Lowry's *The Anarchy and Restoration in America.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a slave. Every detail of his new environment is calculated to disgust and terrify the draftee. He is stripped of any sign of individuality, cast in chains, and thrust into a dark cell, where his only contact with others is with his jailers, who, having but recently been in the same position themselves (and, of course, not really quit of it), are scrupulous in their attentions.

Catatonia or hysteria is not uncommon within the first week. After two weeks of wretched food, inhuman treatment, and, when necessary, the administration of hallucinogens, even the strongest are unequal to their situation. No one is released from solitary confinement until they have gone insane. There follows a period of basic training in which the draftees are conditioned to automatic obedience. They are usually susceptible to the most minimal suggestion in their exhausted condition; a peremptory command, reinforced with arbitrary cruelties, is more than sufficient to ensure an automatic response.

When the process of de-humanization has been completed, the draftee is completely without independent will or judgment. He is without a sense of compassion or even community with other slaves. All memory of past circumstances has been suppressed. The entire process of automatic obedience conditioning from induction to release into the labor force is achieved in not more than eight weeks. Failure is virtually unknown.

DURING this first period, the personality structure that has been twenty-one years forming is erased. Now, as the slave is trained in his work (which seldom, thanks to automation, requires great judgment or specialized skills), he begins to form a new personality suitable to his new environment. Slaves are, at once, aggressive and cringing, violent and lethargic; of brutal instincts and corrupt tastes. If such a body of men were to live in civil society, anarchy and bloodshed would soon be freemen's fate. Therefore slaves are quarantined in large dormitories adjacent to the factories and terminals where they work. Contact with the free population is reduced to a minimum. Those slaves whose work requires contact with freemen live in mortal terror of them, for all freemen possess the right of life and death over any slave—a right which no freeman scruples to exercise.

Within the closed society of dormitory and factory—or, as this unit is commonly called, the concentration camp—the disruptive tendencies natural to slavery are kept in check by the simple

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expedient of working the slaves to nearly constant exhaustion. One day a month, the Sabbath, is devoted to rest, drunkenness and supervised sport—usually knife fights. One of the outstanding problems of industrial management is the reduction of the Sabbath mortality rate.

Further than this, slaves have no vent for their murderous impulses. Their lack of any sense of fraternity precludes revolutionary efforts, and if this barrier were ever to be overcome by a community of despair, their conditioned fear of authority would lead sooner to catatonia than to an outrage. Their work absorbs all their energies, and, as is well known, the most potent energies (for short periods of time) derive their force from hatred and fear. A year is the maximum time for which these energies can furnish a momentum greater than might be demanded of men operating at greatly reduced hours and for mere self-interest. It has been found that one man working these longer hours at greater tensions can accomplish the work of five men working under the conditions that obtained in industries of the late capitalist period. And that is the reason for *quin*quennial bondage.

After a year of slavery, the draftee is returned to civil society. The transition is effected by steadily decreasing sedation in a restful environment after an initial application of insulin and shock treatment. The freeman has only vague recollections of the term of slavery. When it is time for him to return to bondage, character transformation can be achieved within hours by similar methods. The "re-born" slave will have no sense of the time that has intervened. Complete schizophrenia has been achieved.

There is another reason for the institution of slavery than the purely economic. If this were not the case, the obligatory term of service could be reduced to shorter and shorter periods, as advances in automation were made. Technology, on the contrary, is concerned only with maximizing the national product, not with shortening hours or lightening the work. In fact, many jobs are made unnecessarily demanding if they do not naturally meet the minimal coefficient of exhaustion. These coefficients are calculated for three physical conditions (strong, average, and sick) at each of the six age levels.

Jeremy Lincoln, in his famous *Hysteria Economico,* has explained better than anyone else the spiritual meaning of quinquennial bondage. There he wrote: "Men must be slaves because they cannot sustain the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

burden of freedom relentlessly. The problem is not just the madmen who infect our governments, (This was written in 1968 during the height of the Anarchy. The old government was still officially recognized then. J.F.) who, whether their minions are drugged into happiness or kicked into submission, find pleasure only in the exercise of a daemonic power. It is not the queen bee but the hive, the entire power structure, that must be destroyed. Yet not heedless destruction, for this produces merely the mirror image of the past, but destruction and reconstruction aforethought.

"The principle of the hive need not be opposed to the principle of freedom. Man is many kinds of animal. The contradictions that any one man can encompass within himself can be encompassed by a whole society. Significantly, the converse is true: the absurdities of a whole society can be mirrored in the microcosm of a single man. This, then is our hope and our task. Only thus—by keeping the insanities of modern society within manageable bounds—can we hope for a world not of terror nor of robotic, lobotomized happiness, but one of social equity and individual freedom."

Ignorance Is Strength

THE ignorance of the two halves of the divided man of each other is the strength of atopic economy. The slave experiences none of the pleasures nor refinements of civil society and is so conditioned that he can imagine nothing better than the concentration camp. Correspondingly, freemen are comfortably ignorant of the conditions of slavery.

It has been urged (principally by the opponents of Jeremy Lincoln in the last decades of the 20th Century) that slavery is *incompatible* with freedom, that schizophrenia is a disease to be cured rather than a state of mind to be systematically encouraged, and that any job can be made pleasant and ennobling in a healthy society. It is true that the conditions of work could be improved in many factories, mines, and farms, but such improvements are very costly. Efforts in this direction were begun for a short period following the second of the world wars. Certain classes of laborers prospered at the expense of the entire body of consumers. Even then the inequity of such a system was often remarked upon. Imagine the cooling system a coal mine would need to make these environments actually *pleasant!* There can be little doubt, in short, that some occupations (and these often the most basic in an industrial economy) are naturally offensive to the senses

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the intellect of man. To require any single man to devote his life to such chores is to demand the sacrifice of his finest nature to the convenience of the community and the comfort of his fortunate brothers. On the other hand, if every member of society were to devote to these tasks six years in a lifetime of sixty-six, the work would be done without the exploitation of any group of society. Instead every citizen merely sacrifices a part of himself, and this "part" so thoroughly isolated from his consciousness that it need hardly be regarded as a sacrifice at all.

Not all the employments of man need to be divorced from the consciousness of freemen, for not all occupations are by nature enslaving. The simple household-type chores attendant on communal living are neither debilitating nor exhausting, if approached scientifically and apportioned fairly. Scarcely a utopia has ever been imagined in which these tasks were not performed in an equalitarian fashion. In modern atopic society, therefore, all freemen perform "services," which seldom require above an hour a day. The only exception to this is child-rearing, which remains largely the duty of the mother. Here, too, a system of schools, nurseries, and care centers organized at a community level, frees mothers from what might otherwise become a mechanical function.

Another type of work for which slavery is neither a necessary nor appropriate solution is the field of professional activity: music, engineering, architecture, teaching, medicine, scientific research, poetry, aeronautics, journalism, etc. Naturally, in a society in which all men are free to pursue their natural tastes, there is no lack of men and women willing to perform these functions. In fact, almost all adults are engaged at one level or another in these and related pursuits. Moreover, since a freeman's subsistence is not related to his vocation, it is not uncommon to find people engaged in two or more unrelated professional activities.

Such variations in income as exist (they are small) depend upon professional excellence, though prestige and the admiration of one's equals are greater incentives. Greatly increased income can only be received by contracting for a term of servitude beyond that which is demanded by society. Since all men today are able to lead lives of comfortable leisure and since, moreover, too much slavery is detrimental to health, it is quite an uncommon practice.

The last class of work that needs to be considered is administration. Necessarily, this work

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could not be performed by freemen, who are quinquennially slaves, for continuity is essential to it. Administrators are not subject to quinquennial bondage for the further reason that their work requires more or less daily contact with slaves and the institution of slavery. No freeman could endure such awareness.

In return for this exemption administrators are required to work a thirty-hour week year after year. They are not so free as freeman nor so servile as slaves. Their work would not inspire devotion for its own sake as do the professional activities of freemen, and yet it often requires considerable training. Those children of freemen who cannot bear the anxieties that mount as they near their first period of servitude volunteer to be trained as administrators.

Positions and status in the Administration cannot be hereditary, for Administrators have no children. Sterilization is only one of many measures that prevent the formation of an elite in the Administration. (All Administrators are male.) Another measure limits their influence in policy-making. Questions of fundamental policy are decided not by the Administration but by an elective board of freeman, whose professional interests have qualified them for such a position. Their relation to the Administrators of a particular industry is analogous to the relationship between the trustees and the managers of an insurance company or bank in the 20th Century. (Such an analogy cannot be extended too far however: often, the trustees of one bank were the managers of another.)

The problem of *national* economic planning is handled in a variety of ways. Always the same division of functions is the managing principle. The forms employed are derived from the Constitution of the United States as it was before the addition of the Bill of Rights. (The Federal Government is, of course, concerned only with economic matters. Individual liberties are too numerous today to be defined.) The Electoral College is again a deliberative body with discretionary powers. What remains of elective democracy on the national level is a concession to tradition and convenience rather than an organic aspect of atopic society.

War Is Peace

EUROPE has maintained 20th century social forms remarkably intact: Roman Catholicism, love and marriage, benevolent capitalism, and even, despite the ascendancy of Rome, some vestiges of nationalism.

Europe is a sort of museum of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cultural history for America.* The great cities that remain there, Rome only excepted, and the mountain and seaside resorts are devoted to U.S. tourism. Under such circumstances it may at first seem odd that all U.S. citizens are under the Vatican's interdict. Europeans may not visit our shores, and (according to the Church's strictest theologians) may not even *converse* with an American. A Crusade against the New Islam is recurrently being urged by minority statesmen.

Fortunately, the Papacy realizes that without U.S. exports and tourists, Europe would soon be bankrupt and starving, and it has reached a working compromise with the "Antichrist." That the United States has maintained a supply of nuclear weapons while Europe's technology has decayed ever since the Protestant exodus began in 1978, no doubt contributes to the stability of their mutual understanding.

Europe is a favored place for graduate and post-graduate studies in the humanities. It is estimated that one third of the U.S. population between the age of 22 and 26 live in Europe. Branches of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton can be found in Florence, Rome, Paris, London and Stockholm. In the Forties the University presses had some problems with the re-organized Inquisition. The principle then defined by the Papacy—that of separate jurisdictions for Europeans and Americans—has since been applied to all criminal actions. As criminal law no longer exists for Americans, there have been objections by certain Europeans (mostly in the northern countries where Protestant influences still exist) that this is inequitable. Most of these critics resolve their problem by becoming United States citizens; those who do not are usually silenced by the Inquisition.

In the first years of the Restoration, the United States invited immigration from Europe. Within a decade the greater part of the Protestant population had crossed the ocean. The Papacy laid the ban of excommunication on any Catholics who went to the U.S., and this measure was largely successful. (it may be doubted, however, that without the steady emigration from the Northern countries and their colonization by the surplus populations of France and Italy, that the Papacy would have known such success.) The status quo is maintained on the continent by the Church's tacit acceptance of birth control; the

*Note: America—this word has a curious history. In earlier times it was sometimes used to distinguish the continent of the Americas from the territory of its leading power, the United States. The states that once constituted the Dominion of Canada, for instance, were once part of America but not of the U.S. Even then, however, this distinction was seldom made.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

population there has increased no more than 1% in the last decade, and this increase is largely due to the small increments of land that are reclaimed steadily in Eastern Europe, devastated and rendered sterile during the Sino-Russian Wars of 1974-76.

A more detailed history of foreign relations is outside the scope of this essay.* Needless to say, diplomacy has been immeasurably simplified by the mutual destruction of Russia and China in the Sino-Russian war, the ascendancy of the Papacy throughout Europe, and the incorporation of the smaller American states of the 20th Century in the United States. The African Civil War is still continued by that unhappy and decimated people. Australia alone among modern nations is a popular democracy in the old style. Though officially in a state of war with America (since 1982) and the Papacy (since the Revocation of the Italian Constitution in 2013), it carries on trade relations with both powers. The nuclear stockpiles of the United States are the world's greatest guarantee of peace. Thus, the principle enunciated by Orwell shortly after Horoshima—that war is peace—is still today the touchstone of international relations and for much the same reason.

* For a detailed account of European history since 1974, the reader should consult Daphne Stassen's *History of Modern Europe*. For a statement of the orthodox European view, see Giovanni Papini's (Pope Calixtus V) *The Antichrist*.

Love Is Hate

THUS far we have considered only the impersonal aspects of atopic society. No economic or political system is inherently good; as long as the national product is produced, one system is as "good" as another. Goals may be set for the economy (e.g., a high standard of living, maximum utilization of resources, or rapid accumulation of capital goods), but these goals finally rest upon non-economic valuations. The question is always: "What is the purpose of life?" A society's economic structure is its implicit answer to this question.

In the capitalist era, certain economic "laws" were thought to be operative independent of social goals. The Malthusian theory and modifications of it cast their pall over those centuries. Economics was, and in a sense still is, the dismal science. Surely quinquennial bondage recognizes certain of classical economics' unhappy facts—but it has transcended them.

Consider *1984*. Orwell envisaged a world in many respects the prototype of our own. He recognized the social value of schizophrenia, the slavery to the state inherent in any communist society, and the stabilizing effects

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a state of hostility among nations. He failed to see, however, that such a social structure is not incompatible with the highest order of personal freedom. Though probably a latent schizophrenic himself, he did not realize the full potentials of schizophrenia, nor did he really accept the identity of opposites. Freud himself, probably the strongest single influence on Jeremy Lincoln, was blind to the large-scale possibilities of his work. In his last years he wrote a book, *Civilization and its Discontents*, that sounded the death knell of Western culture. With the advantage of hindsight it is perhaps fatuous to point out that—as Julia Knox-Wilson has put it—

> Yesterday's Laments will be Tomorrow's Psalms in another Key.

Civilization *does* put the screws on Eros. Structure deadens and absolute structure deadens absolutely. While life remains in the individual man, he must combat the forces of order that society generates, just as the nature of the social order leads it to deny the desires of its individual members. On the individual level, this phenomenon is mirrored in the struggle between super-ego and id. In older societies, this struggle, if intensified beyond a certain point, would lead to dissociation or psychopathic behavior—at that time functional disorders. Today the split is regulated so that the two halves of the whole man are each capable of independent operation.

Slavery is highly structured and lends itself readily to exposition, but it is difficult to give, in a limited space, an accurate account of the society of freemen. A world without rules is made up of exceptions. Exceptional behavior is the natural province of literature, but aspects of it are bound to elude sociological investigation. The old complaint that everyday existence is dull and empty in atopic society (Australians are fond of this argument) is untrue. The difficulty of describing everyday occurences in an orderly fashion would become apparent to such a critic if he were to try to summarize his own routine behavior in a way that did not seem "dull and empty." The following survey is, therefore, little more than an index of probabilities, a compendium of atopic maxims. A livelier picture is readily available in any number of modern novels.

Sexual satisfaction can be derived from an infinite variety of sources. Throughout history, however, sexual energies have been channeled through an ever-diminishing variety of outlets.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Though taboos might vary from society to society, taboos of some kind were always present. The more civilized the society, the greater were the number of forbidden pleasures.

Today nothing is forbidden to a freeman. He may take his pleasure where he finds it. Atopic man is nothing other than Frued's polymorphous pervert.

IMAGINE how shocking the implications of this would be to even the relatively enlightened citizen of the 20th century. Today a boy or girl can have sex (and, in fact, usually does) with either of his or her parents without the slightest feeling of guilt. During school years they will sleep variously with members of either sex and any race, participate in orgies, entertain fetishes, and indulge in the wildest chastity.

Such a radical change in behavior patterns has been attended by many changes in the physical environment. Many public institutions perform the services of a brothel or public pander. Since slaves perform most agricultural work, the old isolated rural life has become exceptional. The inefficient villages that served the farmers have disappeared. The largest part of the population, male and female, are transient. They live in public hotels and dormitories, appointed to suit the most various professional and sexual tastes. Many former office buildings, no longer needed for commercial purposes, have been refurbished to fill the increased demand for community living.

Though individual homes still exist, these are essentially matriarchal. Women, being exempted from quinquennial bondage are expected to look after their own children. That they do so willingly and happily is an argument for a true maternal "instinct"; women who will not raise their own children and those who are sterile are given a choice between entering the labor force or serving for a period as temple prostitutes.

Non-institutional child-raising produces a wide variety of childhood environments, which leads, in turn, to a variegated adult citizenry. This fact, plus an unprecedentedly rich mixture of racial stocks, is genetically and socially desirable. Freedom and progress are incompatible with uniformity.

As the child matures and discovers himself erotically and intellectually, he usually develops a predilection for genital gratification (in the Freudian sense). Not infrequently, he will establish a stable monagamous or polygamous relationship. Women tend to polygamy, and this has a salutary effect on the child's en-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vironment (not to speak of genital advantages.) He is able to experience a variety of fathers. The usual ambivalence of young Oedipus towards the monagamous father, whom he both hates and admires, are directed towards distinct individuals. Ambivalence, once the chief impediment to full genital development, is eliminated. The conflict itself is, of curse, not eliminated, but it *is* vastly simplified. This fact was observed in the 20th century by Margaret Mead, a researcher in primitive cultures, but strangely it was not then considered as a remedy for the ills of Western Culture. One of the most important consequences of the sexual revolution of modern times is that growing up is no longer a process of rages and rebellions, frustrations and momentary release. It is, instead, experienced as a deepening capacity for pleasure and sensitive experience.

With Oedipal conflicts subdued and major economic discontents no longer existent, violence is uncommon in atopic society, although it has by no means vanished. Only murder is punishable by law. The murderer must pay to society a "wergeld" of years of labor equal to the years of bondage his victim still owed to the economy. Time is valued highly enough to make murder an exceptional occurence. Minor expressions of violence occur, but no more significance is attached to a fist fight than to a passing affair: sexual satisfaction can be derived from an infinite variety of sources.

The freeman passing from youth to middle-age usually undergoes a noticeable character transformation. At this point sublimation seems to occur spontaneously. Men tend to limit their sexual life to monagamy, while their intellectual interests broaden and deepen. This does not mean that as youths they were wastrels or boors. On the contrary: symbolic activity is just as much a part of man's nature as sexual activity. Profligacy and culture are not alternatives. There is a psychic conservation of energy but it is between Eros and Thanatos, not between Eros and Apollo.

THE END

EDITORIAL (*continued from page 5*)

discouraged moods when no one else could, that I have no doubt I will continue to solicit adventures from them." And no wonder they were such good friends. For, Fritz writes to us: "Authors put much of themselves into their characters. So, of course, Harry is to a degree the Gray Mouser, and I am Fafhrd."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FANTASY BOOKS

By S. E. COTTS

The Sundial. *By Shirley Jackson. 192 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 50¢.*

Critics often, sometimes foolishly, attempt to pin down the various factors which cause one writer's work to be chilling, another's humorous, another's dramatic, etc. It is possible to do this successfully with certain writers, but Shirley Jackson is *not* one of them. Efforts to analyze the "how" of her writing almost invariably fail. One reason for this elusiveness is because the surface of her art appears so simple.

This very simplicity forms an interesting contrast with Ray Bradbury's latest novel, *Something Wicked This Way Comes,* reviewed here a short time back. In that book, Bradbury tried absolutely everything to create a mood of terror. He spent pages describing the mirrors, carnivals, freaks and a Dust Witch in a way which showed the reader how desperately he was trying to chill, but all to no avail. Sometimes his insistence got across the *idea* of terror, but not the *emotion.*

Then along comes this reprint, *The Sundial,* by Miss Jackson. Her tools are the tools of every day, not of exotic nightmares; yet the result is more gruesome. What she presents to us is a handful of people in a house waiting for what they believe to be the end of the world. The place is Earth, the time is now, the house solid, and the people perfectly normal. Not nice people, I admit—some are weak, some foolish, others greedy or selfish—but they are normal in the sense of not being freaks or ghosts or midgets or any of Bradbury's other labored tricks.

Miss Jackson's book contains very little exterior action. In the end we never learn whether the world has come to an end, and, if so, how it happens, and how the people in the house will fit into the larger scheme of things. In less skilled hands, this solutionless end might seem a sign of weakness denoting the author's own indecision. But Miss Jackson has prepared the way so well that the lack of this final stroke isn't important. Her prime concern is with the dozen people in the house: their myths and ambitions, and the clash of their wills. Along the way, she pleases her sense of the eccentric and amuses the reader by such touches as a Mad Hatter-type farewell party in which the house folks say

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

goodbye to the villagers, a last expedition for supplies, a run-in with the True Believers; all this in the general tone of a polite English drawing room play.

Her whole skill is centered on getting us involved with these people, introducing the "end of the world" theme, getting them to accept it and then having them prepare physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically. Having succeeded in this, her job is done, and extremely well at that.

Stranger Than Life. *By R. DeWitt Miller. 190 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 40¢.*

The author of this book was a tireless collector of data about all kinds of super-normal and psychical happenings. This volume, as was his earlier one, *Impossible —Yet It Happened,* was the product of years of research. It is certainly safe to say that there is hardly a living person who, openly or secretly, is not fascinated by thinking and reading about such matters as precognition, reincarnation, parakinesis, etc., and Mr. Miller's book is a full and rich exploration of such matters and many more. It is also probably as well-documented as any book on the subject could be at the present time, though his "proofs" run the gamut. There is testimony from "normal" people which must still be suspect as a manifestation of self-delusion or self-hypnosis or simply the agonizing need to impose some explanation, even a psychical one, on material which would otherwise be meaningless or frightening or chaotic. Then there are experiments from more unimpeachable sources—doctors, nurses, physiologists, who are not only trained in the accurate recording of data, but who are often the disinterested observer rather than the involved participant.

Almost all thinking people accept that there are certain aspects of life that can neither be measured nor explained scientifically nor seen nor duplicated at will. Probably the most obvious example of this is the whole field of the creative arts. But it is a long step from there to the acceptance of Mr. Miller's "proofs" of a second body, for instance. Undoubtedly this volume will be swallowed whole by those who already believe in it, and rejected out of hand by those to whom skepticism has become a dogma. However for those who are undecided, it will be a stimulating boon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SHOPPING GUIDE
Classified

Rate: 25¢ per word including name and address. Minimum 10 words. Send orders and remittance to FANTASTIC, One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York. Attention Martin Lincoln.

AUTHORS

AUTHORS! Learn how to have your book published, promoted, distributed. Free booklet "ZD", Vantage, 120 West 31 St., New York 1.

WANTED: Short stories, books, articles, plays of all descriptions for sale to publishers, producers. Free Literature! Literary Agent Mead, Dept. 39A, 915 Broadway, N.Y.C. 10.

PUBLISH your book! Join our successful authors: publicity advertising promotion, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for free appraisal and detailed booklet. Carlton Press, Dept. ZDA, 84 Fifth Avenue, N.Y.C. 11.

BINOCULARS AND TELESCOPES

SCIENCE Bargains—Request Free Giant catalog "CJ"—144 pages—Astronomical Telescopes, Microscopes, Lenses, Binoculars, Kits, Parts, War surplus bargains. Edmund Scientific Co., Barrington, New Jersey.

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

READ America's Amateur Magazines. 8 for $1.00. Seth A. Johnson, 330 Stiles St., Vaux Hall, N.J.

BACK issues, Scientifantasy magazines, books. Free catalog. Gerry de la Ree, 277 Howland, River Edge, N.J.

FANTASY & SF Books and Mags lowest prices list free. Werewolf Bookshop, 7055M Shannon Road, Verona, Pa.

NAME the book—we'll find it for you! Out-of-print book specialists. All subjects. (Title alone is sufficient.) Write—no obligation. Books-On-File, Dept. AMF, Union City, New Jersey.

SPECIALIST: Science-Fiction, Fantasy, Weird Fiction. Books, pocketbooks. Lists issued. Stephen's Book Service, 63 Third Avenue, New York 3, N.Y.

ANY book located. Alvarado Fantasy Books, Box 185-F, El Cajon, California.

"RUDOLPH Valentino is my Spirit Friend." Book now on sale, $1.50 order from author, Anna Ehrhard, 2805 N. Lawndale Av. Chicago 18, Illinois. Sorry no C.O.D.

SEVEN Mortal Loves of John Sincere. The Abc's of Love's Exchange! Just published by Poets Corner Press. Unique creation! Price $2.00 (refundable). Details and free "Lone Hour Books" Index. Cecilia Ferrante, Box 444, Fort Lee, New Jersey.

WHY Buy Books? Send 10¢ For information-Science Fiction Circulating Library, P.O. Box 1308. South San Gabriel, Calif.

FOR Sale hundreds different S-F magazines, list. Jameson, 118 Venice, Lexington, Ky.

HORROR Books—free literature. The World Famous Trans-International Publishing Co. Box 2942, Paterson, N.J.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

INVESTIGATE Accidents—Earn $750 to $1,000 monthly. Men urgently needed. Car furnished. Business expenses paid. No selling. No college education necessary. Pick own job location. Investigate full time. Or earn $6.44 hour spare time. Write for Free Literature. No obligation. Universal, CZ-1, 6801 Hillcrest, Dallas 5, Texas.

PLASTICS—cash in now with my new Home Producers "No-Selling" Plan. I supply everything—even Financing! NPC. Box 23321-G ZZ. Los Angeles 23, Cal.

PLEASANT Way to earn at home. Free Details. Hamilton Studios, Seaford 2, N.Y.

DETECTIVE Opportunities. Experience unnecessary. Write, Wagzner, 125 W. 86th, New York 10024.

I MADE $40,000.00 Year by Mailorder! Helped others make money! Start with $10.00—Free Proof. Torrey, Box 3566-N Oklahoma City 6, Oklahoma.

SPY Camera. Great Sellings. Free illustrated lists. Fack 14, Stockholm 10, Sweden.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

LEARN While Asleep, hypnotize with your recorder, phonograph. Astonishing details, sensational catalog free! Sleep-Learning Association, Box 24-ZD, Olympia, Washington.

LEARN While Asleep. Remarkable, Scientific, 92% Effective. Details Free. ASR Foundation, Box 7021, Dept. e.g. Lexington, Kentucky.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

HOW to find a better paying position and vacancies not advertised. Send $1.00 Walter Kazaks, 234 East 58th St., New York 22.

FOREIGN Employment. Construction, other work projects. Good paying overseas jobs with extras, travel expenses. Write only! Foreign Service Bureau, Dept. D, Bradenton Beach, Fla.

FOR SALE

LEG IRONS, $7.95; Handcuffs, $7.95. Leather Restraints; Fetters; Collector's Specialities; Catalog 50¢. Thomas Ferrick, Box 12F, Newburyport, Mass.

SAVE Money—Free catalog: Photography, Tape Recorders, Hi-Fidelity, Electronics, Tools. Wholesale Radio & Camera Company, Box 3085, Philadelphia 50, Pa.

SUPERSENSITIVE Listening-In-Device picks up any telephone conversation in vicinity. No connection to telephone necessary. Easily concealed. $2.98 complete. Consolidated Acoustics, M1302 Washington St., Hoboken, N.J.

HELP WANTED

EARN Extra money selling advertising book matches. Free sample furnished. Matchcorp, Dept. MD-53, Chicago 32, Illinois.

HYPNOTISM

AMAZE Yourself and Friends! Fantastic results guaranteed within hour! Unique Hypnotism Kit:—Complete Illustrated Course; Two "Hypnospiros"; "Cheverul's Pendulum"; "Secret Nerve Pressure Technique"; "Sleep Learning" Information. $2.00. Henry Fowler, Box 4391, Woodbury, New Jersey.

QUIT smoking without conscious effort or thought with mind conditioning record. $4.95. Guaranteed. Belcher, 2007 Catherine, Dallas, Texas 75211

GOVERNMENT SURPLUS

JEEPS $178, Airplanes $159, Boats $7.88, generators, $2.68, typewriters $8.79, are typical government surplus sale prices. Buy 10,001 items wholesale direct. Full details, 607 locations, procedure only $1.00. Surplus Box 177-C1, Abbottstown, Penna.

PERSONALS

INDEPENDENT Thinkers—investigate Humanism, the scientific personal philosophy! Free literature. American Humanist Association, Dept. B2, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

MISCELLANEOUS

CANNON Fuse 3/32" DIA. Water Proof, Burns Under Water: 10 Ft., $1.00, 25 Ft. $2.00 PPD; William Zeller, 18-H Hudson, Mich.

TRANSISTORIZED Products importers catalog, $1.00. Intercontinental, CPO Box 1717, Tokyo, Japan.

WILD Labels, bumper strips! Strange, startling, unconventional! Krazy Labels, Box 15-H Olympia, Washington.

REMAILING Service, 3.00 monthly, Newell, 171 E. Hurst, Covina, California.

STRANGE Unique Items Catalog 10¢. Black Magic Shop, Dept. E, Box 5664, Minneapolis, Minn., 55417

MOVIES

MEDICAL Film—Adults only. "Childbirth", one reel 8mm, $7.50; 16mm, $14.95. International T, Greenvale, L.I., New York.

PATENTS

INVENTIONS; Ideas developed for Cash Royalty sales. Raymond Lee, 2104G Bush Building, New York City 36.

PHOTO-FILM EQUIPMENT, SERVICES

PHOTOGRAPHERS earn part time, Write PCI, Dept. 470, Arlington 10, Va.

REPAIRS AND SERVICING

SWISSPRECISION repair of All fine Cameras, movie and still, Projectors, sound and silent, Lenses, Taperecorders, Lightmeters. Binoculars, Microscopes, Transistor Radios, Free Estimate, Fast service. Swiss Camera and Optic Service Corp., 866 6th Avenue, New York 1, N. Y.

STAMPS AND COINS

ICELAND: Illustrated list. Handling 10¢. Kristinn Ardal, Keflavik Airport, Iceland.

SURPRISE Collection! Exotic mint British Colonials, absolutely free with approvals Viking, Great Neck 50, N. Y.

TAPE AND RECORDERS

TAPE Recorders. HI-FI Components, Sleep-Learning Equipment, Tapes. Unusual Values. Free Catalog. Dressner Dept. 15, 1523 FA Jericho Tpke, New Hyde Park 15, N.Y.

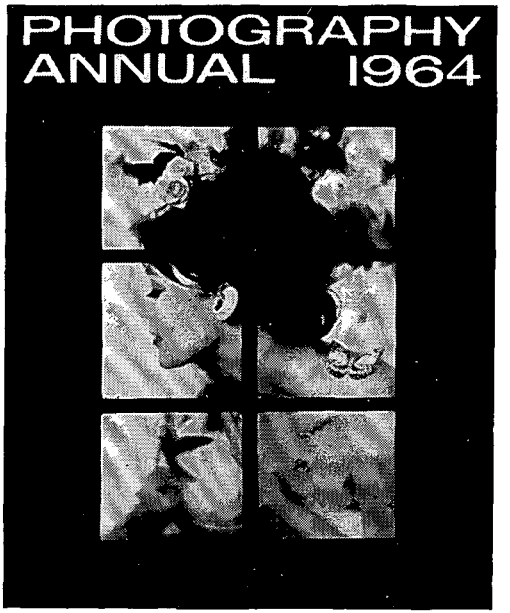
WANTED TO BUY

QUICKSILVER, Platinum, Silver, Gold. Ores analyzed. Free Circular. Mercury Terminal, Norwood, Massachusetts.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The year's outstanding collection of photographs is in the



Featuring:

- *Portfolios of five of our most creative contemporary photographers*
- *Popular Photography's choice of next year's Pulitzer Prize-winning picture*
- *Dorothea Lange's "Remembrance of Asia"*
- *Pictures from Ken Heyman's new book, "Willie"*
- *Selections from the powerful "Our Daily Bread" show*

Plus a memorable International Portfolio of fine pictures

1964 PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL

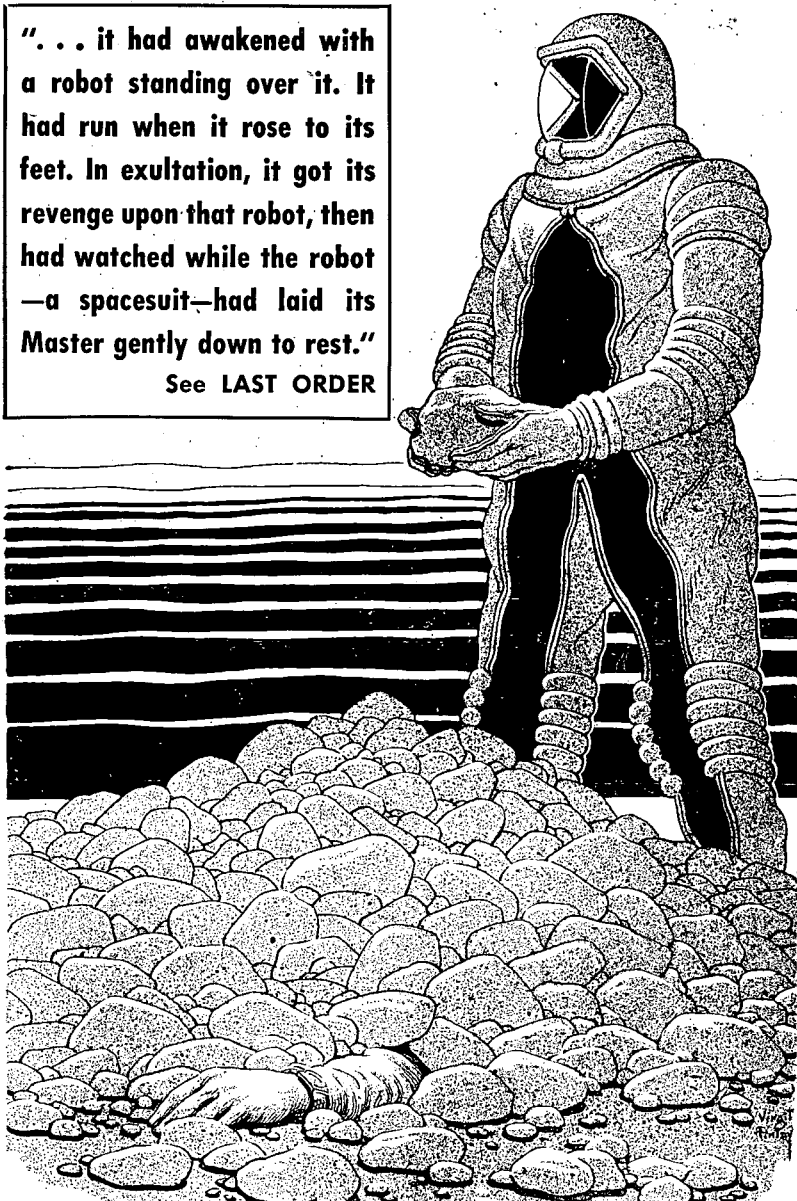
Now on sale. Get your copy at your favorite newsstand or photographic supply store.

Only $1.25

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"... it had awakened with a robot standing over it. It had run when it rose to its feet. In exultation, it got its revenge upon that robot, then had watched while the robot —a spacesuit—had laid its Master gently down to rest."

See LAST ORDER



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED